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COMPTON FRIARS.

A Tale of English Country Life.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "MARY POWELL."

O yellow leaves, so dry and dead,
My heart is with the vanish'd days
When summer's light was on you shed,
And soft cheeks glow'd to words of praise.

Where are the eyes which smiled content,
When June had brought the roses fair?
Where all the forms that lightly went
Across the lawn with wind-blown hair?



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TO HIS GRACE THE
LORD ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY

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BY THE

AUTHOR OF "MARY POWELL,"

NOT UNDER A MISTAKEN IMPRESSION OF THEIR MERIT, BUT IN
HUMBLE AND THANKFUL ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF HIS KINDNESS
IN SENDING HER WORD THAT HER BOOKS HAD PLEASED HIM
DURING HIS LATE TRYING ILLNESS.



PREFACE.

THIS Tale has already appeared in a serial form. The writer hopes her usual readers will not now be harder to please than heretofore, and that she may find she has still a mission, though a humble one, to lure from sad thoughts, to solace, and to cheer.

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COMPTON FRIARS.

CHAPTER I.

AN OLD RELIGIOUS HOUSE.

“I seem like one
Who treads alone
Some banquet-hall deserted,
Whose lamps are fled,
Whose garlands dead,
And all but he departed.”

OH the merry days at Compton Friars! At that time between daylight and dark, called “blind man’s holiday,” when people sit round the fire before candles are lighted, chatting or thinking of old times, I often recall memories of the dear family that lived once in that old country-house. I see its gray moss-grown walls, its heavy roofs, its many gables, its glittering vane, its ancient sundial, its tall, dark, weird pines, its crooked cherry-trees and apple-trees—the old place seems

steeped in quiet, till the silence is broken perhaps by the chattering of jays, the caw of a rook, or the sweet, sudden laugh of a lovely little boy running out of the house and brightening the whole scene with joy and life. I sit and think on this scene, I say, till surprised into a smile, or, it may be, into a tear.

This mansion, as may be inferred from its name, was monastic ; or, as Crashaw says, "An Old Religious House:" but later additions, made at widely different times, rendered it what I knew it—a good, substantial, and very quaint old family house.

I seem to see it now, as I first saw it, on a fine October evening. There had been a school-girl friendship between my mother and Mrs. Hartlepool, though their marriages placed them in spheres widely removed. They saw nothing of each other for many years, nor did they often exchange letters. But Mrs. Hartlepool was kindness itself ; and when she heard I was drooping a little, she invited me for a month to Compton Friars. I need not say how delighted I was—I had never had such a treat in my life ; for we lived in a small house in a small street, looking out on the dead wall of a great brewery where my father was clerk.

Bright and gladsome, like a cluster of Sir Joshua's cherubs, were the faces that greeted me at the lodge-gate of Compton Friars. Urith, a girl of eighteen, was the eldest of the group. Then came Helen and Marianne, girls of most sweet and engaging aspect, pliant and graceful as sweet peas; two younger still, and still prettier—Eva, a perfect Hebe, with fair flowing hair and starry eyes; and Blanche, who had something serious and heavenly in her face, as if she were listening to the whisper of angels. Thus, the younger they were the prettier they were (for Urith was not pretty). Lastly, little Edwin, who truly might be called Edwy the Fair. Soon we were all trooping towards the house, friends at first sight, one carrying my bag, another my umbrella, Edwy walking backwards before me, as if I had been the Queen. Presently he ran off to open a gate. "Thank you, master Neddy," said Eva, as we passed. "Neddy's a donkey, which I am not," said he, giving her a playful blow, and then running off, while she ran after him. At the same moment something dark and swift flew noiselessly past, almost brushing my face. I said, starting, "Oh! what is that?"

"Only a bat," said Marianne, laughing. "Did

not you see Ariel on his back? I suppose he was too fine for mortal sight. Bats are curious creatures—useful too—they live entirely on gnats and other night insects.” And she hummed—

“On a bat’s back do I fly.”

It was almost too dark to see the house when we approached it, but the streaming yellow lights from one range of windows, and the ruddy firelight from another, while a flickering gleam from story to story showed that some one was coming downstairs, had an inexpressibly pleasing effect on the imagination. In a minute or two Mrs. Hartlepool was kissing me in the hall, and saying cheerfully, “Why, Bessy, you are your mother all over, though you have blue eyes and light hair. Welcome, my dear, to Compton Friars.”

Oh, what a genial, large-hearted woman she was!—the light of the house, the blessing of the neighbourhood. At that time she was only in middle life; tall, comely, benign, with fine teeth, and a most delightful smile—a lady every inch, yet not disdaining the meanest offices, if need were, for the sick—equal to every household emergency, knowing how to direct every thing to be done, because she knew how to do it; fertile in

resources, admirable for presence of mind, pervading the whole establishment with her healthful influence.

The Hartlepoons were not rich. Nor did they enter into county society, though the best county families visited and valued them, for the sake of something intrinsic, seemingly, that they could not help recognizing. Mr. Hartlepool's moderate means resulted from close application to business. That his family might enjoy the benefits of a country life, he was content to forego much of their society. It was his wife's charge to exercise a wise economy, and give her children a good home training. County balls and large dinner-parties found no place in their scheme; though they loved plain hospitality.

"Let me show you your room, Miss Lyon," said Urith, running up some wide, shallow stairs covered with crimson drugget.

"Don't call me Miss Lyon, please—call me Bessy."

"I will, if you will call me Urith. This is your room."

And what a dear little room it was! Very, very small—one of the so-called "cells"—and very old and quaint; with uneven floor and creaking door

and antiquated furniture ; but still there was an aroma—Marianne would have said from the apple-room beneath—but, in short, it was Compton Friars.

I could not help likening it to the prophet's "chamber on the wall;" and truly the plenishing was much the same—a bed, a stool, a table, and a candlestick. In addition, however, I found a most comfortable chintz-covered chair, a mirror that might have been coeval with Anne Boleyn, and a book-shelf, which I suppose the prophet had not. I ran over the titles of the books before I left the room, and found some enticing ones among them.

The first evening was spent in frank, unlimited chat, truly refreshing and recreating. It was entirely female talk, for Mr. Hartlepool and his eldest son Basil were not to come down from London till the end of the week. By bedtime we seemed to know each other as well as if we had been long acquainted—how soon one understands one's *congeners!* Their conversation refreshes instead of fatiguing.

When at bedtime I tried to lock my door, I found the key turned round like a windmill. I went to the casement and peeped behind the white

curtain. An orchard of cherry and apple-trees lay beneath me, silvered in fitful moonlight. All at once I heard a plaintive cry that terrified me. I heard it again and again! Hastening to Urith's room, I tapped for admittance, and said, "Oh, do you know I think somebody is being murdered in the orchard."

She listened for a moment, and then said, laughing, "Oh, it is only the old white owl; but will you come and sleep with me if you are frightened?" I declined with thanks, for I was ashamed of my silly fears, and wished I had not betrayed them.

The next two days I was made acquainted with some of the sylvan beauties of the neighbourhood, now in the glory of autumnal colouring; and in the evening we read aloud the latter part of the "Huntingdon Peerage," while Mrs. Hartlepool filled in the grounding of a chair-back, representing

"Lapdog and lambkin with black staring eyes,
And parrot with twin cherries in its beak,"

devolving on Eva and Blanche the duty of filling her needles.

On Friday and Saturday, as two blithe young cousins, familiarly called Tom and Phil, were

expected in addition to Mr. Hartlepool and his eldest son, great preparations were made for them in the culinary department, in which all more or less assisted. While with much complacence I was frothing cream with a whisk, entered to us Mrs. Hartlepool with a letter in her hand.

“Your papa is going to bring down Mr. Liddell.”

“Oh !”—a prolonged, general groan of dissatisfaction.

“Where are we to put him, when the house will be so full already? Who is to entertain him? Bessy, we’ll make him over to you—you shall take him off our hands.”

“Much obliged,” said I, laughing. “What is the matter with him?”

“He’s an old crony of papa’s—a regular old bachelor.”

“Nonsense; no such thing, Bessy,” said Mrs. Hartlepool. “He’s in the prime of life.”

“Oh, mamma! Fifty, if a day!”

“My dear, you are talking of what you know nothing about. You are no judge of age. Don’t be set against him, Bessy. These children know nothing of him but by hearsay—they will like him very much when they see him. I dare say they

will all be scheming to sit next to him before he goes."

"What could make papa think of bringing him?"

"What but natural kindness to an old friend whom he is going to lose sight of for a long time, even if he ever sees him again? I expect you all to be on your best behaviour to Mr. Liddell, and make much of him. He is a sensible and estimable man, and he is going out to Demerara, so this is the last opportunity we shall have of showing him attention."

There was plenty of laughing about this Mr. Liddell, who was expected to spoil every thing, and be a complete wet blanket. The arrival of the three youths—for they were mere lads, though they considered themselves young men—gave us pleasanter things to think about. Mr. Philip Augustus Meggot was a schoolboy of the upper form, soon to prepare for Oxford. Mr. Thomas Hartlepool was a midshipman. The first was slight and espiègle; the second stout and broad; both had plenty of fun in them. Mr. Basil Hartlepool was exceedingly gentlemanlike and quiet—his destination was India.

I now subsided into a bystander, and had little

to do but observe and listen, which was quite sufficiently amusing. Oh! the droll things said, that I can no more recall than that summer's flies and flower blossoms! Mr. Meggot had a dry way with him that was infinitely diverting. Mr. Tom Hartlepool (I may as well call him Tom, like every one else) was never at a loss for *repartie* or retort. I think he had the most native wit of the two, though he may have been behind the other in Greek and Latin. Mr. Basil seemed to have come home chiefly to be amused, and contented himself with listening and laughing. All these young people were on the best possible terms, without a shadow of flirtation; they might have passed for brothers and sisters.

When the time for the stage that left London at four o'clock drew near, it was dusk, almost dark; but the window-shutters were left open and the curtains undrawn, because Mr. Hartlepool loved to see the blaze of firelight stream out to welcome him. Urith presently left the fireside circle, and began to play a lively tune on the piano—the other young people sprang up to dance. Mrs. Hartlepool and I sat enjoying the lively, pretty scene. Tom danced like a sailor, with more vigour than elegance. Meggot and Marianne moved with

perfect grace—reminding me of the couple at the top of Hogarth's Country Dance, a print of which I had noticed on a folding screen. Suddenly I became aware that other eyes were looking on—eyes that, from outside the window, momentarily rested on me—and with indifference. I started a little, and saw another pair of eyes, shining with good-humoured mirth, that I knew must be Mr. Hartlepool's. At the same instant Mrs. Hartlepool cried, "There's your father!"—The music and dancing abruptly ceased, and the children, crying, "Papa! papa!" flew to the window. A sudden blast of cold fresh air rushed in, as a tall, burly man with short curly black hair and ruddy face, stepped in among them, and a general welcoming ensued, which Mr. Liddell, a little aloof, seemed to witness with amusement. He, too, had a kind, though less demonstrative reception—the window was closed, and soon we were all seated at a substantial meat tea.

I am quite sure the girls had plotted to seat me near Mr. Liddell, but they did not succeed; and Helen, promoted to that honour, gave me such a look across the table, that I could hardly keep my countenance. It was a very merry meal—I remember there was some fun made about Sally Lunn,

who, Mr. Liddell said, must have been the Wellington of pastrycooks, and that she deserved a statue raised to her memory. Marianne immediately said, "A pie-crust statue, stuffed with mince-meat, with a currant for each eye. Suppose we open a subscription for it—I'll be the treasurer."

"No, no, *I'll* be the treasurer—you'll be running away with the public money!"

Later in the evening, when all were very lively, a renewal of the interrupted dance was proposed; and as I knew myself to be a useful player, though a homely one, I offered to play, that Urith might dance, which she gladly did.

Mr. Hartlepool stood before the fire, looking at the blooming young people with fatherly pleasure, and his wife looked equally happy. They were, at that time, a family untamed by sorrow or misfortune, unthinned by death. I thought of it as I played, and wondered what their future would be. Presently Mr. Liddell came and stood soberly beside me. In a pause at the end of the quadrille, as he continued to stand beside me, I said, for want of something better to say, "Don't you dance, sir?" He smiled pleasantly enough, and said that he had done nothing so vivacious for a very long time, but that he would if I would be his partner. I shook

my head, and said I never danced ; and then we had a little chat that was rather agreeable than otherwise, till Tom clapped his hands and cried, " Music ! music ! "

CHAPTER II.

A DEED WITHOUT A NAME.

“ Oh ! 'tis the melody
I heard in former years !
Each note recalls to me
Forgotten smiles and tears.”

THOUGH I was only twenty-three, I knew very well that those impertinent youngsters thought me on the borders of old-maidism, and took liberties accordingly, such as impertinent youngsters *will* take with their elders and betters. I did not mind it, of course ; it was part of the fun of the game.

At bedtime I was shut up in my chamber on the wall, and musing a little before I undressed, when there was a tapping at the door, and it was gently pushed open (thereby displacing a chair set against it) by Helen and Marianne, who first put in their smiling faces, and then came in altogether, closing the door behind them.

“ Oh, Bessy dear ! will you grant us such a very, very great favour ?”

“Yes, to be sure. What is it?”

“We always take a walk after church. It is one of papa’s Sunday treats, which he would not miss on any account. He will walk with mamma. Poor Urith will have to walk with Mr. Liddell unless you do.”

“Why not poor Helen or Marianne?” said I, laughing.

“Oh, that’s not to be thought of,” cried Helen eagerly, “and besides, you have said you would, so you must!”

“No such thing.”

“You did! You said ‘Yes, to be sure;’ so that’s quite enough.”

And away they flew, without giving me time for a stronger protest. I could not help laughing; but it seemed quite unlikely that Mr. Liddell would trouble me with his attention. He was certain to walk beside Urith, or Mr. and Mrs. Hartlepool, unless he started off somewhere with the young men.

Mr. Liddell, however, was not a good walker, nor, seemingly, fond of striplings; so he stuck to the side of Mr. Hartlepool, talking with him on mannish subjects, while I securely brought up the rear with two of the girls. All at once the hill-path

narrowed, and grew steeper. I found we were walking in single file. When the path brought us to a turfy table-land, I saw Mr. Hartlepool between his wife and Urith; looking round, I saw the younger girls chasing their little dog back towards the house; and before they returned, panting and laughing, Mr. Liddell was walking beside me, and sedately praising the scenery. I could not help feeling amused when there was no obvious cause for amusement, and was afraid I must seem very easily set smiling, but it was not my fault. In fact, our dialogue was soon grave enough, for Mr. Liddell mentioned his intended voyage to Demerara, and his reluctance to leave his country and all his friends. Before long we joined the party in advance, and the talk became general.

We went to church twice, and in the evening Mr. Hartlepool read us a sermon. Afterwards there was much pleasant conversation. Next morning Basil Hartlepool and Mr. Liddell returned to London, while Mr. Hartlepool remained a day longer, and the cousins went out rabbit-shooting. There was some nice glee-singing in the evening.

The morning post came in while we were yet in our bedrooms. A letter for me was pushed under my door, which I picked up in some surprise and

anxiety, lest it should be to summon me home. It had the London post-mark, sure enough; but instead of being from either my father or my mother, it was signed William Germaine Liddell!

It took away my breath!—it was an offer of marriage! It apologized for the abruptness and incoherence which the writer's approaching departure must excuse—but said that an indelible impression had been made on him by the exquisite frankness and simplicity of my very first address to him—“Don't you dance, sir?”

The blood rushed to my face. I felt absolutely giddy. What could have given the man the boldness thus to address me? How hastily he must be accustomed to draw conclusions, if on such a very short acquaintance he could decide on my being a suitable companion for life!

After the first surprise my next impulse was to laugh. I looked at the letter again, and saw that he spoke of suitable provision for me, and all my own property settled on myself. “Ah, poor man,” thought I, “he little guesses that I have not a penny—that we are as poor as can be.” This consideration made me serious. I wondered how my parents would approve my rejection of this offer, which might appear to them too good to be refused,

in spite of the odd manner in which it was made. But Demerara! that would entail a melancholy separation, the mere idea of which alarmed me. I was persuaded they would not hear of it.

The breakfast bell rang! Oh what a guilty start I gave! I was not half dressed—my hair was rough; but I would not be too late for the world; for I felt as if every body would guess what made me so. As I hurriedly made ready, it occurred to me that, however disagreeable it would be, I ought to make this extraordinary step of Mr. Liddell's known to Mr. and Mrs. Hartlepool; and I determined to screw my courage to the point directly after breakfast.

When I joined the family I was received just as usual; but Tom and Phil looked inquiringly at me from head to foot, and then full in my face, as if something were amiss in my appearance. I took the first opportunity of a furtive look in the glass, but could see nothing out of its place. I suppose, however, there was some flurry in my manner, for Mrs. Hartlepool kindly said, "I am afraid you were hurried this morning, Bessy. There was no occasion."

I said "Oh no," very carelessly, and scalded my mouth with hot tea.

After breakfast all were dispersing to their several avocations ; and Mrs. Hartlepool was leaving the room, when I said, in a low voice, " Can I speak with you for a minute or two please ?"

" Yes, certainly ; come in here," said she, opening the door of a little room appropriated to her special use. Mr. Hartlepool was there already, in his slippers, reading the newspaper.

" Shall I send him away, my dear ?" said Mrs. Hartlepool.

" Oh, it does not much signify," said I, trying to speak carelessly, " only I've had a very extraordinary letter."

" A letter !" said Mr. Hartlepool, with surprise, turning round and looking full at me. I coloured up, and put the letter into Mrs. Hartlepool's hands, saying, " Perhaps you can explain it."

The moment Mrs. Hartlepool began to read it I saw a very odd expression on her face. Mr. Hartlepool saw it too, and stretched out his hand for the letter, without speaking ; but she did not give it to him till she had read it quite through, and then she handed it to him, looking odder still.

I never saw a man's face work in such an extraordinary manner as Mr. Hartlepool's the next moment. The two words " Those boys !" burst

from him, and then he exploded with laughter. Mrs. Hartlepool began to laugh a little too, but as if ashamed of doing so, and in pain for me. I stood motionless, my ideas in the greatest perplexity.

“I’ll flay them alive, the young rascals ; I’ll give them a famous good trouncing,” cried Mr. Hartlepool. “To take such a liberty in my house, indeed ! with a guest of my wife’s ! You did quite right to let me deal with them, Miss Lyon, instead of giving it them yourself”—patting me kindly on the shoulder as he went out. “I’ll soon settle them. Hallo, you young rascals !”

“I thought it was best,” said I faintly, congratulating myself that no one guessed how I had been taken in. But motherly Mrs. Hartlepool had a woman’s eye and a woman’s intuition. *She* saw through me, and gave me a little caress, though only saying lightly, “Young sauceboxes ; too bad of them. But you took it very well, Bessy.” And then I gave a little forced laugh.

A moment after, the door opened, and Mr. Hartlepool appeared, more like a constable than his usual self, with a couple of malefactors in charge, over whose heads he looked at me with determination in his set lips, but a twinkle in his eye, as he said gruffly, “Down on your marrow-bones.”

Phil had a truly hang-dog look, but Tom, though his colour was greatly augmented, looked any thing but really contrite, and there was such a funny gleam in his bright dark eye, and such a twitch at the corners of his mouth, that it was difficult not to laugh in his face.

Down he plumped on his knees, crying, "Oh, do forgive me! Oh, I am so abject!"

"Yes, we're both abject," said Phil, in a whining voice. "Do forgive us."

"I don't know that I shall," said I, determined now to have some fun out of it. "I think you ought to be kept on bread-and-water for several days."

"Only an April-fool trick," pleaded Tom.

"April nonsense," interrupted Mr. Hartlepool. "Why this is October—what are you talking about? You are a couple of young scamps, and if Miss Lyon forgives you it will be a great deal more than you deserve."

"Please, sir, I wasn't as bad as he was," said Tom, in a confidential whisper meant to be heard.

"Please, sir, I wasn't as bad as *he* was," retorted Phil.

"Well, you are both bad enough in all conscience," said Mr. Hartlepool. "Be off with you

now, and let us have no more practical jokes. They are an exceeding bad taste, and argue a very low tone of mind."

This was said with a sternness that sent them off without another word ; but directly the door closed on them he took up the letter and read it again with a silent grin. "Such a shallow affair!" said he, tossing it on the table. "Not a bit like Liddell. They gave you too little credit for discernment, Bessy. The young scamps! they won't soon forget the lesson I read them."

Again I felt thankful he did not know I had been taken in.

"Boys will be boys," said Mrs. Hartlepool, taking up her work, "but really this was going too far. It might have made you very uncomfortable, Bessy."

"Oh, she took it very well," said Mr. Hartlepool. "I'm glad that Basil had no hand in the—the——"

"The deed without a name," said Mrs. Hartlepool.

"But it *had* a name—the honest, honourable name of Liddell. If I were to hand them over to his tender mercies, they would not soon hear the last of it."

"Only that he is soon going to Demerara," said Mrs. Hartlepool.

“Ay, poor fellow. I hope he won't catch the yellow fever. He himself rather thinks he shall. And when one is predisposed, you know—has presentiments and so forth—I don't know, upon my word, that it would be a bad thing to take a wife out with him.”

“To catch the yellow fever too?” said I.

“No, to keep him from catching it, of course.”

“I don't know that she could,” said Mrs. Hartlepool. “And really it would be very sad for the poor thing to come back in a few months a widow—even with Tom's ‘good settlement.’”

“I wonder what Tom would think a good settlement,” said Mr. Hartlepool. “Pity he stuck to generals. He might have put down a good round sum while he was about it.”

“Only to increase my disappointment,” said I, “like the fox and the grapes.”

“Oh! *your* disappointment! No danger of that. If they must have their joke, they could not have played it on a safer person, nor one more good-tempered, Miss Lyon.”

“Really, sir, if you say such kind things, I shall be glad the trick was played.”

“Plain truth, I assure you. I never say insincere

things, nor play hoaxes. 'The exquisite sweetness with which'—'Don't you dance, sir?' Ha, ha, ha!" And he went off chuckling.

When he was gone I told Mrs. Hartlepool I thought the less that was said of the silly trick the better. She agreed with me, said by-gones should be by-gones, it was always a pity to take up jokes seriously. I said I hoped the girls would hear nothing about it. She said she thought there was no harm in Urith's knowing; but the younger ones certainly need not. It was not desirable that they should hear their father's friend turned into ridicule. Such an honourable man, too! And she related some traits of him which certainly were much to his credit; and I could not help thinking that to have had the refusal of such a man would have been a credit. But then I thought of his middle-aged appearance, his sober demeanour, and felt that he was not exactly the person to go with to a distant and perhaps unhealthy place at a moment's notice, to live and die with.

When I next encountered the lads their deference and propriety were exemplary—almost overacted. For I feared it *was* acting; I did not believe the penitence to be more than skin-deep. In passing under my window I had heard Phil

mutter "tremendous wiggling," and I heard Tom surreptitiously warble,

"Hey, diddle Liddell !
The cat and the fiddle."

That did not look much like remorse.

.

CHAPTER III.

DEEDS, NOT WORDS.

“Have you conspired? Have you with these contrived
To bait me with this foul derision?

* * * * *
This sport, well carried, shall be chronicled.”

Midsummer Night's Dream.

I HAVE not done with the affair yet. After a few days (which, by-the-bye, were very pleasantly spent), Mr. Basil Hartlepool returned to us. I must here say, once for all, that he was a highly honourable young man, whose pale intellectual face betokened those qualities which were afterwards fully developed. Directly we met, I saw by his heightened colour that he knew about the deed without a name. In fact, he had posted the letter, though at Phil's request he had abstained from looking at the address, and had not the least idea it was to me.

Some pedestrian excursion had been planned, which, on the young men's account, caused us to

breakfast an hour earlier than usual. Hence the post came in just before we finished breakfast, and the letters were laid before Mr. Hartlepool. He began to look them over—there were but two or three—and presently, clearing his throat loudly, said, “Ahem! a letter for *you*, Miss Lyon.”

I gave a little start, and, as I stretched out my hand for it, I met Tom’s big eyes, rolling in their orbits, directed towards me over the edge of his breakfast-cup, and immediately felt sure that he had had something to do with it. Without formal apology I hastily opened the letter, glanced at once at the signature, saw “William Germaine Liddell,” and indignantly flung it open across the table, saying, “Once I might be taken in—a second time is too much to expect.”

“What—what—what?” began Mr. Hartlepool, catching up the letter almost fiercely, while Tom looked unutterable things, and all the rest were at a pause. Then, glancing hastily over its contents, and turning very red, he exclaimed, “By George!”—the first time, Urith afterwards assured me, she had ever heard her papa begin a sentence with “By,” unless “by-the-bye,” or “by the way.”

“Tom, this is too bad of you,” said Mrs. Hartlepool, in displeasure.

“ Upon my honour, aunt, I’ve no hand in it. I don’t know what it is.”

“ It is you, then, Phil, and I take it very much amiss of you.”

“ Upon my word, ma’am, it isn’t.”

“ You think it fun, I suppose,” said I, in a voice which I vainly tried to steady, “ as the boys thought of stoning the frogs, but I must say I think it uncivil and unkind ; a joke is no joke that is only on one side.”

“ Upon my soul,” “ Upon my life, Miss Lyon,” chimed they in together, rising from their chairs and coming round to me, and trying to take my hand. But I would not be appeased. I held it firmly to my side, and pressed my nails close into my palm, and turned away my head, that they might not see the tears of wounded feeling that *would* start. But Tom did see them, and looked full of concern.

“ Bessy, forgive them,” said Mr. Hartlepool, in a strangely softened voice, “ they have nothing to do with it. Here, take your letter, my dear, and carry it to ‘mamma’s room,’ and read it quietly—and enjoy it, if you can: we will come to you presently,” adding, in a loud whisper, as he gave it me and shook my hand, “ *It’s the real thing this*

time, Bessy." I hastily withdrew, upsetting my chair in my agitation, which Phil replaced with a studious care as if it had been brittle as glass, while Tom flew to open the door for me, and gave me a most expressive look as I passed.

When I got into the little room and sat down in Mrs. Hartlepool's great easy-chair, I was in such a flutter, that at first I could not read a word. I was soon able to do so ; and what a manly, fine-hearted letter it was ! What a different one from Phil's ! I have them both before me now. Worthless relics to keep, some may think. Ah ! they are not so to me.

It was a most extraordinary affair, certainly. The hoaxing letter had had nothing to do with the authentic one—at least, so it appeared to me. "Coming events cast their shadows before." It really seemed so in this instance.

Well, here was a salve for wounded feeling : an honourable, eligible match offered to me by a man who had learnt on his journey to London with Basil that I was humbly born and portionless—a man in a position greatly superior to my own, of great worth and estimation. I could not help dwelling pleasantly on all this, and the weight it would have with my father and mother. But then—ah ! I felt it was but a dream—a shadow. He

was *not* a man with whom I should care to pass my life, for whom I could give up my family, home, and country.

“Well, Bessy?” said Mrs. Hartlepool, in her gentlest, kindest voice; while Urith stole in after her and closed the door. I immediately left the great chair.

“Oh, Mrs. Hartlepool, he is very kind, but—it cannot be.”

“Well, so I supposed,” said she calmly; “but, before you quite settle it so, I think you owe it to him and to your parents to think it well over.”

“Yes, of course,” said I. So there were we in conclave, a council of three.

“It is really settled already,” said I. “It is quite out of the question. My parents would never consent.”

“Are you quite certain of that? He is an excellent man. They could not but think him unexceptionable.”

“No doubt; but, dear Mrs. Hartlepool, they would never let me go to Demerara!”

“That might depend on yourself, Bessy. Supposing that they knew you were really attached to him?”

“But I’m not,” I interrupted. “How could I be, in three days?”

Mrs. Hartlepool smiled. "The time was as short for him as for you."

"I suppose it suddenly occurred to him that a wife would be desirable," said I, "and that he had no time to look out for one who might be expected to raise difficulties."

"Well, granting it so, in addition to that, he thought *you* desirable; and if you thought him so, the question would be settled."

"No," said I, "for my parents would not let me be snatched from them in such a sudden way."

"Almost as suddenly as Abraham's servant carried off Rebekah," said Urith, "and yet, you know, she went willingly."

"That was in the East, and in patriarchal times," said I. "It is not done now."

"Oh, it is sometimes," said Mrs. Hartlepool. "There was Miss Jones."

"I should not like to be quoted for a precedent, like Miss Jones."

"Well, you know best," said she, laughing a little. "I only wished you clearly to understand your own mind, and not to refuse in haste and repent at leisure. Nobody could have been more surprised than I was."

"I think *I* was more surprised."

“Hardly; for I know him better than you do. I know him to be slow in forming conclusions.”

“And I am very quick; so, you see, our characters are opposite.”

“Diverse, not opposite. If there were diversity or opposition of principle, that would be a serious obstacle, but I believe you would suit each other well in that respect, and like each other better and better every day.”

But I shook my head, and said, smiling, “It won’t do.”

“Well, I suppose not. I can understand your objection to leave your parents.”

“Oh, so can I,” said Urith warmly.

“But parents are apt to think more of their children’s welfare than of themselves. You know, Bessy, I have lost sight of your mother for many years. Your father I never knew. I know nothing of your affairs, my dear, but from your mother’s letters. They are always cheerful and contented; still she is naturally anxious for your future; and if she and your father knew you were well provided for——”

“But I should not be,” said I, with tears in my eyes. “If I were away from them I should be miserable.”

“Oh, I can quite feel with you,” said Urith.

“Well, then, nothing remains for you but to answer the letter,” said Mrs. Hartlepool, rising. “We will leave you here to do so in quiet ; and Mr. Hartlepool, who has started off the boys and is going up by the ten o’clock stage, will post your letter for you in town.”

“Thank you ; I will write it directly.”

It seemed a formidable task, but, on the contrary, I made quick work of it, and finished it in six lines. I showed it to Mrs. Hartlepool, who said it would do very nicely. I then asked her to be so very kind as to give it to Mr. Hartlepool, which, with a smile, she engaged to do.

Urith was superintending her sister’s practising. As the day proved rainy, I had little to do but to dream over my needlework, while the children did their lessons ; and the uniformity of my home-life made me think more of this occurrence, strange as it was, than I need have done. Could I have foreseen it, I should have been dismayed at the thoughts of visiting Compton Friars, whereas the visit had been a treat, in prospect, and was a treat in reality. My musings were cut short by a summons to a general game of shuttlecock, in which various substitutes for battle-

dores were extemporized, including a saucepan-lid.

The pedestrian party returned late—wet, dirty, tired, hungry—and as if they had had enough of each other's company. Their talk was disjointed, and not very entertaining. Tom, who was brightest, made one attempt at amusing the others, but it proved a failure.

“I say, let's cap verses. Here goes :—

“ ‘ A Grecian youth of talents rare.’

Go it, Phil.”

But Phil said drearily, “It's no go. We should only use the old ones.”

Next day they left us. What a difference it made! and yet, after a little while, we felt additionally cozy and comfortable. We drew closer round the fire, had long, delicious, intimate talks, and were in no hurry for bedtime. Mrs. Hartlepool told all about the early love and early death of Tom's father and mother, which was new to me, but seemed of equal interest to the girls, who knew about it already. She spoke of Phil, and of the high expectations formed of him by his parents, but said he had not been judiciously brought up.

“He's nice, but I don't think him very clever,”

said Marianne. She was told that was because she knew nothing about it.

“Tom’s cleverer,” said Marianne.

“Tom’s cleverness is of a different sort,” said Mrs. Hartlepool. “He has a good deal of mother-wit, but is ready rather than deep. His disposition is good, but he has not much application.”

“If he passes his examination, won’t that prove that he has application?” said Marianne.

“If he passes. We don’t know that he will.”

“I think he will ; I feel sure that he will,” said Marianne.

“I’m afraid he won’t ; I’m almost sure that he won’t,” said Helen.

Then they talked of Basil, of whom they instanced numerous pleasing traits ; and I wondered how Mrs. Hartlepool could contemplate sending such a son to India so calmly, since it involved losing sight of him for years, perhaps for life.

I think nothing else happened. Oh yes ; I wanted to speak to Urith ; and, expecting to find her in the study on the stairs, I opened the door, when she hastily called out, “Don’t come in ! Oh yes, you may, though—I’m only writing. Now and then, by way of relaxation after lessons, I scribble a little.”

“Do you mean you are writing a book?”

“Well, I am trying; but no one knows any thing of it.”

“Oh, do let us hear what you have written.”

At first she said no, but in the end I persuaded her; so in the evening the manuscript was read, to our no small delectation. It was a cheerful, pretty little story, with plenty of light dialogue; but Mrs. Hartlepool said, “My love, there are too many characters.”

Urith confessed the fault, but we all agreed that the story deserved printing. The question was, What was the established course to take?

We were all profoundly ignorant; but I declared my readiness to take any amount of trouble in making inquiries on my return to London, provided I received full instructions; and this offer was joyfully accepted.

CHAPTER IV.

PARTING AND STARTING.

“So warmly we met and so fondly we parted,
That which was the pleasanter I could not tell—
The first look of welcome their sunny eyes darted,
Or that kiss of friendship that bless'd our farewell.”

How sorry I was to leave them all! But there was a “needs must”—other guests were to take my place, and I was wanted at home. So, warm farewells were said, and dear Mrs. Hartlepool gave me something to look forward to at the last moment, by saying, “You must come again when the strawberries are ripe.” All the young people accompanied me to the lodge; they were in high spirits and most affectionate: their last word was, “Mind you come back at strawberry time!”

We kept each other in sight as long as we could, exchanging expressive looks, and then I leant back in the coach, which, fortunately for me, was empty, and thought what a pleasant visit it had been. We seemed to have leaped into intimate friendship,

overstepping all preliminary formalities; I had pleasant memories of all, and especially of Mrs. Hartlepool; I wished every English home had some one like her. She was not weakly indulgent; her children feared as well as loved her; Urith as much as any. They did not put her off with eye-service; they would plead in defence of their own cause or opinion, but never rebel against her judgment, for it was held to be based on justice, good sense, and truth.

The country looked very pretty in the twilight, and almost more so when lights began to glimmer in cottages, and turnpike-houses, and small shops, and wayside inns. It was quite dark when we rattled over the London stones, which were shining with wet mud that reflected the lamps and costermongers' lanterns. The noise, movement, and bustle exhilarated me, though I had only been away from it a month; and there was something homelike and familiar in the dirty but cheerful face of the old city, that made me think, "London, with all thy faults I love thee still." To be sure, the air was raw and foggy, but that "mighty heart" made even my individual pulse beat quicker. Here, people crowding into a theatre—there, into a chapel—poor housewives bargaining for a cheap

supper—grand shops brilliantly lit up—feeble rays from some solitary candle in kitchen or garret—taverns with flaming lights—I can see them all in the fire.

I wonder if any body but myself can take the least interest in all this. What does it signify? it interests me, so I shall continue to put it down. Some of these days my memory may fail; then I may be glad to read these trivial, fond records. But what if my sight should fail too? what if I outlive my interest in them? No matter; I have not done so yet.

My father, finding I had not returned at the usual tea hour, had gone to his old crony, Mr. Tremlett, a fellow-clerk and an old bachelor, with whom he occasionally played cribbage; so my mother and I had a long talk by ourselves; and how we did enjoy it! First, she exclaimed at my improved looks, and at the many kind country presents Mrs. Hartlepool had sent her; then she busied herself about my tea; then, with a pretence of work in her hand, but I with not even a pretence, we sat close to each other and to the fire, and talked over every thing, more especially that noteworthy deed without a name!

It quite excited her: she amused me immensely.

“What did you say? what did he say? what did she say? how did you look? how did you feel? were you not utterly surprised? had you the least inkling? Oh, those boys!—the impudence of their trick!—how could they ever look you in the face again?—what a good thing Mr. Hartlepool took it up so!—And what is Mr. Liddell like? Describe him exactly.”

I did so as faithfully as I could.

“Well,” said my mother, with a smothered sigh, “you did quite right, there can be no question about that; but it’s a pity he had to go to Demerara.”

“If he had not, it would have made no difference in me,” said I. “And it would have made all the difference in him. I should never have heard from him.”

“Oh, I cannot think that. Depend on it, he liked you from the moment he saw you through the window.”

“I’m positive he didn’t,” said I, laughing. “His look was any thing but flattering.”

“You couldn’t see well through the glass—and, besides, looks are not to be depended on. I dare say he thought it very good-natured of you to play, that Miss Hartlepool might dance.”

“Really, mother, that was very little to build a liking on.”

“But it made a beginning, and first impressions go a great way. Very likely the Hartlepoons talked a good deal about you when you were out of the room.”

“Not the least likely,” said I, laughing; “not a bit in their way. They had plenty of more interesting things to talk about.”

“But, my dear! here was the effect—where was the cause? There must have been one somewhere.”

“That we never shall know, and it is not of the least consequence. It was very droll, certainly—and embarrassing.”

“*That*, it must have been,” said my good mother, laying her hand on mine and letting it rest there. After a pause, “We don’t want to get rid of you.”

“Dear me, no, mother, I’m sure you don’t,” and I stroked her hand fondly. “That encouraged me to be so decided.”

Looking earnestly into the fire, she said, “It would have been a great lift for you.”

“A lift I did not want;” and I was just going to add, “don’t let us say any thing to my father about it to-night,” when in he walked.

“So ho, Miss Bessy! here you are,” said he, very cheerfully. “All the better for your holiday, I suppose?”

“Peter!” interrupted my mother, “such a surprise!—Bessy has had an offer!—a very good one.”

“Hoity-toity,” said he, and began to whistle, with his back to the fire and his hands in his pockets. “And who is the swain?”

So then it had to be all gone over again, and I had quite enough of it before I went to bed; but it was as well to have it over. My father was greatly tickled; he saw it differently from my mother—thought less of the lads’ impertinence and more of their fun. He was almost more surprised than she was, at “a moneyed man’s” acting in such a precipitate way, but set the idea of Demerara aside with decision; and there was an end of it—he hardly named it again. It was not so with my mother; I am sure she brooded on it. Well, and so did I; it did neither of us any good, except that it made us sensible of our affection for each other, and that no merely worldly advantages would have reconciled us to the wrench that had been proposed to me.

In twelve hours I was jogging on as usual, and

very pleased to find myself at home, though with a tender feeling whenever I thought of Compton Friars. Dear Compton Friars! what were they about now, I asked myself. There would be little Edwy chattering to his papa, his mamma, his sisters, Timothy—any body who would listen to him ;—there would be Mrs. Hartlepool sedulously packing her husband's sandwich-case ; the two youngest girls at their lesson, Helen practising, Marianne taking a run round the garden and returning in a glow—Urith in the study on the stairs, which was now dignified by the name of the Scriptorium—ah! that reminded me I was her *chargée d'affaires*.

I was delighted to have something to do for her that she could not do for herself. So as soon as my father was off to the brewery and my mother was at her housewifery, I dressed myself with some care, and told her I had a commission to execute for Miss Hartlepool.

My mind was pre-occupied by it, so that I did not notice any thing unusual as I went along, though I afterwards remembered one or two little things that did not strike me at the time. At length I reached the neighbourhood of St. Paul's, where it had been pre-arranged that my first in-

quiries should be made, though the firm had only been chosen at random. I easily found the shop; inquired if I could speak to Mr. So-and-so, and was told he was engaged. I thought there could be no harm in waiting; and waited a good while. Other people came and went, and seemed to laugh and gossip rather than transact business. Presently two gentlemen passed through the shop and went out. I said, "Was that Mr. So-and-so?" and was told it was. I was disappointed, and went away, soon to come to another bookseller's. Here again I went in, and inquired if I could see one of the gentlemen of the firm. The shopman replied very civilly, "Mr. Frederick is at home—what name?" I thought it was no use withholding it, and said, rather drily, "Miss Lyon." He bowed, went away, and presently returned, saying, "Will you step into the counting-house?"

In the counting-house a gentlemanlike young man on a tall stool at a tall desk bowed and looked inquiringly at me. I felt rather fluttered, and said I had come to obtain some information concerning the publication of a manuscript. He asked its nature. A story. In three volumes? In one. Was the author known to the public? No: this was her first attempt. Did she wish to publish on

her own account ? She wished to know what was the best way of publishing, being quite unacquainted with the subject. He smiled a little ; and then, after a pause, told me good-naturedly enough, there were three ways of publishing. The first and best was, to sell the copyright of your manuscript—if you could get any body to buy it ; the second was, for the publisher to undertake all the cost, and for the profits, if any, to be divided ; the third was, to publish on your own account, have all the cost and all the profit.

This seemed very clear and satisfactory. I asked him if he would buy the copyright. He smiled, and said his hands were full at present—his list was made up. I asked him what would be the expense of publishing on the author's own account. He said, that depended ; and taking up a pen, he made a neat little list of the items ; so much per sheet, &c. I thanked him very much, and said I would forward it to my friend. He said he should be happy to print for her if she should decide to publish on her own account, and bowed me out. I went away well satisfied with the result of our interview, and set him down for a very courteous young man. As I passed through the shop the shopman looked hard at me. For any thing he

knew, I was a genius of the first quality, about to burst upon the world. I heard some one say carelessly, "A pretty fair day for the show."

"Very," said he.

I stopped short. "I beg your pardon," said I, anxiously, "is this the day of the Lord Mayor's show?"

"Yes, ma'am—always on the ninth of November."

"Dear me," said I, in a panic, "and my way passes just across the line of procession. Perhaps I had better wait."

"I should say you'd better go as fast as you can, ma'am—the crowd will get worse and worse."

I lost no time in following his advice. The back streets and lanes were quiet enough—much more so than usual. I flattered myself I should escape the procession.

All at once I stepped right into it. The reason the back streets were so empty was, that every body had deserted them for the show. There were the bells clanging, trumpets blowing, heralds in cloth of gold, trained bands, banners, men in armour, and I know not what all. In the distance loomed the state coach, like a prodigious vat upon wheels, with its allegorical paintings and sculptures, glorious with varnish and gold; within it the Lord Mayor in his

robes, the Lady Mayoress in feathers and spangles, the mace-bearer, the big sword, the chaplain—in the distance the sheriffs, with their rich equipages and liveries, reminding of the palmy days of the great livery companies. No wonder the people huzzaed.

But I was in any mood but a jocund one—like a hunted mouse, seeking for some aperture of escape, and finding none. I gazed for one moment and turned back—but there was a dense crowd behind me that had rushed from the back streets in a moment. They not only closed my way of *escape*, but jerked me forward and bore me along the principal thoroughfare. So there was I, like a frightened straw (if there could be such a thing), borne along the swollen current!

In about three minutes, however, as I was being hurried past some offices, with an open lobby, I managed to step just within the doorway, as a gentleman, locking his counting-house door, was coming out. It was Mr. Liddell! He looked as startled as I did, and a good deal more put out.

“Miss—!” he could not recollect my name, “What! in the Lord Mayor’s show?”

“I had no idea!—I have been taken by surprise,” I faltered.

“So I should think,” said he, laughing a little.

“Dear me, it is uncomfortable for a lady—have you no one to take care of you?”

“No: it was my own inadvertence—my stupidity—”

“Would you like to step in here?” said he, rather awkwardly; “I’m going away, and my housekeeper will take care of you.”

“No, thank you, not on any account; I must go home directly; they will be so frightened if I am late.”

“You must just let me see you across, then,” said he, “directly the crowd will let us.”

All this was said in raised voices, there was such an abominable noise. I believe he felt quite as uncomfortable as I did. He watched like a hawk for an opening, and, directly there was one, piloted me across, very efficiently, and a little way down the opposite street. Directly I could make myself heard (he bending his ear very close down to me, and now and then giving a sharp look), I said,—

“You must think it so strange, my being here. I had a commission to execute for Miss Hartlepool; and my head was so full of it, that I forgot all about the Lord Mayor’s day. It was very stupid.”

“It was just like you,” he said, very strongly, “to think of others before yourself; about Miss Hartle-

pool's commission before your own convenience and safety."

"Oh, there was nothing in that: I was quite pleased that there was any thing I could do, or try to do, for her, they are such a very nice family."

"Delightful," said Mr. Liddell. "Hartlepool and I were at school together: that makes me out rather an old boy, you will think," added he, smiling; "but he was my senior, though we were on the same form. What I meant was, he was always a good fellow—first rate. And his family seem to take after him."

"Oh yes. I have only known them a month, but I seem to have known them years."

"You have seen much more of them than I have. In fact, I never saw Hartlepool in his country-house till I came down when you were there—ahem——" He cleared his throat, and seemed to have some embarrassing recollections of his visit.

"It's a nice place," said he abruptly; "not too much of a place for a man in his circumstances, and with such a numerous little tribe dependent on him—Basil the only working bee among them."

"Mrs. Hartlepool is such a delightful woman."

"Very. I always thought her so." And we walked on in silence.

At the first corner I stopped. He said,—

“Well, then, I suppose we must part here. You wish me a safe voyage, I hope?”

“Yes, I do, indeed,” I said with emphasis. “I thought you had sailed.”

“Sail to-morrow,” said he, and paused. “Well, good-bye—Göd bless you;” and shook hands and left me.

My heart beat fast, because of the surprise, and the previous flurry, and many reasons; but one thing I felt forcibly borne in on me—that I was very glad I was not going with him!

His ship sailed the next day. I learned it from my father, who saw a newspaper at the brewery.

Some months afterwards I was a good deal shocked by my father’s saying one evening, “Mr. Liddell’s ship has never been heard of, Bessy; it is supposed she is lost. What a good thing that *you* were not on board!”

CHAPTER V.

HELPING A FRIEND.

“How various their employments whom the world
Calls idle ! and who justly, in return,
Esteem that busy world an idler too.”

WHEN I told my mother the events of the morning, she said, “Why, you are always having adventures !” which amused me, because I had been accustomed to think I never had an adventure in my life. She evidently thought that Mr. Liddell and I might have improved our chance meeting more than we had done.

I said, “Why, he did the very thing I wanted ! saw me through my difficulty, and then went away.”

Without thinking any more about him, I began a letter to Urith, telling her all Mr. Frederick had said, as exactly as I could, and assuring her it would give me the greatest pleasure to continue to act for her, if I could do so to her satisfaction.

Urith wrote in great glee by return of post. She

thanked me much more warmly than there was occasion for, condoled with me for falling in with the procession, and could not help saying something droll about the way I had got out of it. She would have liked to sell her copyright (who would not?) but thought the second plan wonderfully disinterested on the publisher's part, because she would get half the profits for only the trouble of writing; whereas they would get only half the profits for all the risk and trouble of printing. But then, on the third plan, she would have *all* the profits, and only the expenses to pay! It will be observed how ingeniously she distributed the word "only."

My mother, looking up at me from her work, said, "It seems to me that both of you make very sure of selling all the copies. How do you know that people will buy?"

I said I supposed the book would go off like other books, if people liked it. My mother looked dubious, and said she hoped Miss Hartlepool would not get throwing away her money on a chance. People were often drawn into difficulties by embarking in such things.

"Such things," indeed! I knew my dear mother had had no literary experience whatever—not even an interview with Mr. Frederick—so

her opinion of the matter had not much weight with me, whatever might be my value for it in general.

Urith, held back by her prudent mamma (more by token, she had not pocket-money enough to embark in the expenses herself), was directed by her to ask me to make further inquiries among the trade. How did we know Mr. Frederick was as good as he should be, and certain not to take advantage of inexperienced genius? We had better consult other houses. So to other houses I went, gradually acquiring more self-possession, and making my inquiries more purpose-like and technical; and found the task a pleasurable one, with the additional flavour of serving my friend. In fine, we had good reason to believe that Mr. Frederick was an upright, honourable man. I was so glad of it, for the credit of the trade, as well as of my skill in physiognomy! As, with all his willingness to oblige the ladies, he could not be brought to the point of buying the manuscript, Urith was obliged to make choice of an alternative; and her father being taken into her counsels, though professing himself as ignorant as a baby of that sort of thing, the bold step was at length ventured on, after much comparison of estimates, &c., of printing on her own account.

The reader (if I ever have one) will here say, "Of course the poor girl burnt her fingers." No such "of course" in the case, though I believe it often happens. The book came out in a pretty little volume, *and sold*; and after paying the bookseller's account, Urith found herself with just the same amount gained by herself.

That *was* a delight and a triumph! Of course we all thought Urith had found the philosopher's stone, though we were not philosophers who thought so. It was pleasant to witness the good girl's modest elation—there may be such a thing, though it sounds contradictory, for she was undeniably elated; but most at having found, as she thought, a sure and honourable way of independence and of doing good. She was much surprised at her success, and did not think she had deserved it, for she said she knew her story was full of faults she could not mend; she thought people had been easily pleased.

Of course I was as delighted as could be at the success of my mission. Mrs. Hartlepool expressed her sense of my good offices by sending me a very pretty writing-case, completely fitted up. In thanking her for it, I assured her I had expected nothing of the sort—the trouble had been a plea-

sure. If I had known she wished to send me any thing, I should have asked for a copy of the book. And that came too, with my name written in it, in Urith's prettiest hand,

In the course of my inquiries it had secretly amused me to be continually taken by the book-sellers for the authoress herself, instead of her friend. It struck me, Why should I not be one, now I know so many details? The sufficient reason suggested itself, Because I have nothing to write about, and if I had, I should not know how to write it. Nay, but, thought I again, there must be plenty of unused subjects, and as for knowing how to write, that must come by study and practice. It seemed to me that study must come first, and that I must acquaint myself with the styles of others, before I tried to form one of my own. And this set me on reading *with a purpose*, which I have continued all these long years. It did not lead to any immediate result, but I gradually accumulated materials, almost all of which I have since turned to account; and I think my mind, such as it is, owes more to that winter than to any other.

CHAPTER VI.

STRAWBERRY TIME.

“When the months of spring are fled
Thither let us bend our walk.
Lurking berries ripe and red
Then will hang on every stalk,
Each within its leafy bower,
And for that promise, spare the flower.”

WORDSWORTH.

WHAT pretty, poetical ways there were of old of indicating the seasons! “The time of first-ripe grapes,” “of the pomegranates’ budding,” the time of figs was not yet,” “the time of the singing of birds.”

With what pleasure I saw a little pottle of early strawberries on the fruit-stall under the brewery wall! Mrs. Hartlepool had kindly said, “You must come again when the strawberries are ripe;” and the last cry of the children had been, “Remember strawberry time!” That time was now come, and I wondered whether the invitation would be repeated.

Yes, indeed! I need not have been afraid, for Mrs. Hartlepool never forgot her promises or engagements. The day was named; it was very kind of her, for people were coming and going as they do in a pantomime; the scene was continually changing—the house always full; for there were many besides me who liked to visit Compton Friars in strawberry time.

I arrived at mid-day; there was no one to meet me at the lodge, which was a disappointment; but when I reached the house the mystery explained itself, for a large party of visitors were driving off, and my friends came forward to welcome me. At first it had seemed to me there were more of them than usual; they were all in good health and good spirits, and gave me a most affectionate greeting.

Urith soon carried me off to my old chamber on the wall, which looked familiar and delightful, and had had the black skirting-board painted white, and a new lock put to the door, not of the wind-mill construction. A fresh-gathered rose was in a flower-glass on the toilette.

Urith sat down to talk to me while I was unpacking.

“What a good friend you have been to me!”

said she heartily ; “ I shall always be grateful to you.”

“ Pray don’t think of it ; I was delighted to be of service.”

“ Oh, I shall, I assure you. The book is out of print now, and a second edition is talked of, but not at my own expense. Dr. Grey, who has been so friendly all along, says that would never do, and has got his own publishers to undertake the next edition on the division-of-profits system.”

“ That will be very nice,” said I.

“ Yes,” said Urith dubiously ; “ only I shall have but half, instead of all. Still they take all the loss, if there is any” (with a little laugh at the unlikelihood). “ And the little thing has been reviewed !—there have been two very approving though short notices—a third was rather ill-natured.”

“ There will always be some to find fault, if a thing is ever so well done,” said I.

“ Yes, and of course a first work is not perfection, though they didn’t know it *was* my first. I should like a few words of quiet explanation : however, it’s no great matter.”

“ Very likely the critic has never written any thing half as good.”

“ Perhaps not ; and at any rate I hope my second

work will put my first in the shade—for I'm at it again, Bessy!"

"I was sure you would be," cried I, with enthusiasm. "What is it about?"

"A higher flight this time—but I shall not divulge the secret yet," said she, laughing. "And it requires a good deal of reading up, which Miss Harbledown says will be a certain good, at any rate."

"Miss Harbledown—who is she?"

"Don't you know we have a governess?"

"No, indeed!"

"How curious we should not have told you! I am not under her, of course, but I like her very well as a friend. We get on pleasantly together, though she has some curious points. I shall like to know what you think of her."

I now remembered some one vanishing in the distance as I entered the house, who had impressed me with a sense that the family was larger than usual.

"It was found," pursued Urith, "that my writing now took up so much time, that I could not give undivided attention to the lessons; so mamma told papa that unless I gave up authorship we had better have a governess than that our tempers

should be too much tried or the lessons be neglected. She feared I should hate the one and hold to the other. Papa said there was no reason why I should cease to cultivate a natural gift (Oh, Bessy, they are so very kind to me!), and that if mamma could find a nice, sensible governess at a moderate salary, she might engage her. So, after some trouble, she found Miss Harbledown, who is not accomplished, but she brings the young ones on very nicely. She is strict, but they are fond of her."

Here the two o'clock dinner-bell rang loudly.

"That's for us," said Urith, starting up. "That's one of the family arrangements to which Miss Harbledown objects. She says two o'clock is neither one thing nor the other."

When we entered the dining-room, we found all the family assembled. I was introduced to Miss Harbledown, who gave me such an investigating look, that for some time I had such a consciousness of being examined as to be unable to do the same thing by her in a less obvious manner. When I did so, my inference was that she might be a little over thirty; her person was massive, her countenance determined, but shrewd and good-humoured; her manner occasionally abrupt, her

discourse savouring of pedantry, but fluent and entertaining. She seemed to like Mrs. Hartlepool, but treated her as an equal, not with deference.

“Miss Harbledown is peculiar,” Mrs. Hartlepool afterwards said to me, “but she has very good points. I believe her to be thoroughly conscientious, and she is certainly bringing the girls forward. Edwy remains under Urith’s care; it is good for them both, but her sisters were getting rather too much for her. The two eldest were learning almost faster than she could teach; she could not have kept ahead of them much longer, and the youngest took up rather too much time. By mutual consent, the lessons were getting shorter and shorter every day; so that it was high time,” said Mrs. Hartlepool, laughing, “to have a governess.”

“A very good plan for all parties,” said I.

“Why, yes, since this has been a prosperous year to Mr. Hartlepool; otherwise we could not have afforded it. But it would ruin the children to come to a stand-still or go backward. Miss Harbledown, though she has solid attainments, is not accomplished, therefore she accepts a salary of 60*l.*”

So here was Urith, by devoting herself to

authorship, necessitating the hire of a governess ! I don't say whether it was right or wrong.

Directly after dinner a foray was made on the strawberry beds, ostensibly to gather strawberries for tea, but at least as many were eaten on the spot as carried in-doors, and amid such laughing and chattering ! Miss Harbledown was as busy and as merry as any. I liked her for that. She said, "When you work, work ; when you play, play," was her maxim. I thought it a very good one. And there were such noble strawberry-beds, and such enormous strawberries ! Eat as many as we could, they would hardly be missed.

Eva, sitting on her heels under a brown umbrella, looked like a great mushroom. Mrs. Hartlepool talked of setting us all to gather strawberries for preserving, some day. Meanwhile, she and Blanche were filling a little basket with fruit, which was afterwards covered with green leaves, and then sent by Edwy to a poor sick girl in the village. Edwy said not a word about being despatched on this errand while the rest remained eating ; but Mrs. Hartlepool gave him an additional helping of fruit at tea-time, without note or comment.

After tea we had a delightful walk of an hour or more. We met a little fellow who could hardly

toddle, with something closely hugged in his pinafore. When asked what it was, he said, "a rabbit." But on Blanche's obtaining a glimpse of it, it proved to be a hedgehog. Blanche said, "Nasty thing!" and started back; but Marianne said, "Not nasty at all. I defend the character of the hedgehog. He rids us of snails, slugs, and blackbeetles."

"Marianne, you always say every thing is of use," said Blanche. "Of what use are blackbeetles?"

"To feed hedgehogs," said Marianne, readily.

On our return every one got something useful to do, while there was reading aloud—an improving book, of course.

Ten pages each was the allotted portion; fifty pages were thus soon got through, with little fatigue to the readers, and certainly none to the listeners. To make the thing complete, Miss Harbledown should have examined us, to prove how much we remembered. But she abstained from this cruelty.

Her own attention was caught by some fancy-work of mine—with the pencil, not the needle.

"That's ingenious!" said she, rising and coming quite close. "How do you do it? Ha! I see. It seems quite easy. It is new and pretty. Did you

invent it? Then you are very ingenious. I don't possess the creative faculty myself. Come here, my dears, and see what Miss Lyon is doing. It is not difficult. I see the trick of it, ingenious though it be. I believe I could do it."

"Would you like to try?" said I, rising, and offering her my paint-brush.

"Thank you. I should like it very much—" sitting down to it with zeal. Then followed a profound silence, except that she unconsciously breathed very hard. "Humph—it is not quite as easy as it appears. There seems a little knack—"

"Done with a spring, somehow," said Mrs. Hartlepool, smiling.

"It only wants a little practice. One must give one's thoughts to it, I see, as in every thing else. I could do it if I gave the time. Thank you, Miss Lyon," rising and returning the brush.

"I am sure you could," said I. "I was awkward at first. It is hardly worth your attention, but if you like to learn, I am sure I could soon teach you."

"Do you mean that you will?" said she quickly, and quite a pretty expression came into her gray eyes. "You don't mind making it common?"

"Oh no."

“Bessy, that is very nice of you,” said Mrs. Hartlepool. “I very much dislike exclusiveness.”

“And this being your own invention, you might take out a patent,” said Urith, laughing.

I laughed too, and said, “It would never be worth while. What time will suit you?”

“What time will suit *you*?”

“Oh, any time.”

“Thank you very much. Then, twelve o'clock. I always let the children have a run in the garden at that hour. Proceed we now, my dears, with Charles the Fifth.”

Next morning I was awoke by sounds less sweet than song of birds,—of scales, single and double, major and minor, steadily practised from half-past six to half-past seven, for such had been the decree of Miss Harbledown. As soon as one captive was released, another took her place, till breakfast.

Afterwards, at about eleven o'clock, a gentlemanly young man, on a very indifferent horse, rode up to the door, was shown into the drawing-room, and gave music-lessons for two hours; after which he partook of a mutton-chop and glass of wine, had a little cheerful small-talk with Mrs. Hartlepool, and then remounted his pony. He came

once a week from a neighbouring town, and seemed a good master.

“It is as much as my head will stand,” explained Mrs. Hartlepool, “in addition to all that strumming in the morning, which I hear all the time. Mr. Hartlepool and I do *not* consider music the one thing needful, but I’m really afraid a good many parents do, judging from the time they make their children give up to it.”

CHAPTER VII.

WALKS AND TALKS.

“And thus in chat the instructive hours they pass'd.”

WITH Miss Harbledown and her pupils shut up in the schoolroom, and Urith and Edwy secluded in the Scriptorium, there was nothing to hinder my having long familiar talks with Mrs. Hartlepool.

“I am not sure all this headwork is good for Urith,” said she to me one day, “but the fit is on her, and it is as well to allow her bent, or impulse, or whatever it is to be called, fair play. She comes down to dinner rather jaded, and I am particularly glad to have you here at present, because, being not only a sympathizer, but a helper, your society is very acceptable to her ; and your keeping her in the open air as much as you can will do her much good.”

“I am sure it will do me at least as much,” said I, “and I thank you for giving me so pleasant an office.”

“It will be good for you both, and she wants you to see more of our country walks, and you will like to do so. Happily, Miss Harbledown is aware of the value of exercise in the open air, and does by rule what we have been accustomed to do spontaneously. The worst is, she taxes their little memories too much. It is in such things that a mother knows what is good for children better than a governess. In my own case, the wonder is that I was not made an idiot by the stupid routine exacted of me ; and I have always taken care to avoid the evil for my children.”

“They all do credit to your system in their looks !”

“Yes, I think they do, except Urith. But I am determined that when she has finished this new book, she shall not begin another for a good while. Otherwise, setting aside the question of health, she will become a complete scribbler, and be downright disagreeable.”

“Oh, Mrs. Hartlepool !” said I, laughing.

“She really will. So keep her out of doors as much as you can, and talk with her on other subjects. I have invited a good many friends here this summer, and they will make a change for her. It is not,” she resumed, after a pause, “that Urith has

to assist her family. All this authorship is merely a hobby, and I fear it may interfere with her future happiness. She may be happy either married or single ; but it may cast the die for her, and doom her to single life whether she will or no."

I said, "You may rely on my keeping her in the open air as much as I can, and I will talk of any thing rather than of writing books, if she will let me."

Blanche here came in, so I knew it was time to keep my appointment with Miss Harbledown. She was gratified by my punctuality, and soon showed herself as clever at learning as teaching. Pleased at my telling her so, she expressed her wish to be useful to me in some way, and offered to teach me botany.

"There are plenty of wild flowers here," said she, "and it is well to know something of them.

I replied I should like it very much if it did not interfere with my walking with Miss Hartlepool.

"It will do her good as well as you," said Miss Harbledown, "and give you both an object. So we will begin this afternoon, in the Friars' Walk."

Presently she said, "I don't think much of this fancy of hers for writing. If it were something improving, something connected with science, for

instance, there would be direct good in it ; but this continual drawing on imagination only fills her head with chimeras. All are agreed that excessive novel-reading weakens the mind, and if so, of course novel-writing must. Only think what a picture Sir Walter Scott gives of the weakening effect produced on Waverley by his desultory studies, which were, in fact, his own."

"And yet," said I, "they made him the 'mighty wizard of the North'—'the great Unknown.'"

"*They* did not make him, he made himself."

"But partly by their means."

"And what did they make him? A writer of fiction ; I grant you, a great one."

"Ah," said I, with strong sympathy, "they made him more—not only master of 'the art unteachable, untaught,' but as noble-hearted a gentleman as ever breathed—as loyal as Sir Henry Lee—as honourable and true as his Peveril and Guy Mannering."

"*They* did not make him—but I perceive you are a bit of a partisan," said Miss Harbledown, with a smile, for which I did not love her. "If I had my will, Helen and Marianne should not read Scott's novels yet ;—for one thing, they are so full of swearing ; but I found them household books, so no wonder Urith sees no harm in writing a novel."

I was hurt for my friend, and said, "The beauty of her little tale is, that it is *not* a mere novel."

"Is it not? I have run through it, but I cannot say I observed any particular moral."

"It was the way a healthy fresh young nature found to speak. However, Mrs. Hartlepool, like you, thinks she writes too much."

"Not 'like me,'" said Miss Harbledown. "She thinks of the body, I of the mind—all the difference between a mother and a preceptress. Mrs. Hartlepool has an excellent nature—'tis a pity she has not a little more culture."

"I see no fault in her at all," said I strongly.

Miss Harbledown seemed to become aware that remarks on the shortcomings of one to whom we were both under obligations might as well be withheld. And how superficial her objections were! Is not a mother superior to a preceptress? And did not Mrs. Hartlepool care for the minds as well as bodies of her children?

In the afternoon we had a most charming expedition to a hill-side avenue of old, very old trees, called the Friars' Walk. The brakes and bournes abounded with wild flowers, wood-strawberries, blackberries in blossom, and a profusion of ferns, which in those days I must admit,—

“Wasted their treasures of delight
Upon our *uninstructed* sight.”

Here Miss Harbledown was in her glory, holding forth to me and her pupils, who listened with edification, till Urith drew me away, and said, laughing,—

“Come along, Bessy, and don't be pedantic. *We* can admire nature in the grand mass.”

Eventually, however, Miss Harbledown triumphed, for she made her botanical lectures so interesting that Urith became one of her most intelligent scholars. And many a search did we have afterwards for specimens; and sometimes a hunt for a rare plant, involving scrambles down steep banks to the brink of deep pools, had almost the excitement of a fox hunt.

Now for the visitors. The first to come, only for a few days, was a distant relation, Miss Anne Keith, with whom we one and all fell in love. Intellectual without the least pedantry, beautiful without the least vanity, there was a dignified simplicity about her that was perfectly charming. And such a voice! her singing alone would have enthralled us. While she remained we had romantic moonlight walks to hear the nightingales and look

for glow-worms. Miss Harbledown said of her to me, that she thought the last finish to her manner was given by her being engaged. There was no flightiness nor flirtiness about her. What she attributed to the circumstance, I laid to the character—and we judged of it on very slight premises, for who was there to flirt with but Mr. Basil Hartlepool? I could, however, conceive that a deep attachment, successful, or unsuccessful, to Miss Keith, might colour a man's whole existence.

We were very sorry to lose her; but then came Basil, with a travelled friend, Mr. Crofton, such a traveller as may now be less rarely met with than in those days—who had been in the Bible lands, and on the banks of the Euphrates and Tigris—the land of the Arabian Nights—among the Tartars of Thibet—to Ophir, once famous for gold—to the land of Prester John. He had travelled in Africa, too—penetrated as far as Borneo—seen the Sheik El Kanemy—shot giraffes and elephants: we listened to him as Desdemona listened to Othello.

This delightful Mr. Crofton! Though his face and hands were the colour of mahogany, his features by no means handsome, and he was by no means young, the enthusiasm for him was such

that I believe any one of us would have deemed herself honoured by the offer of his hand. Not that we lowered ourselves by such vain thoughts ; no, we knew him to be wedded to his gun and his pencil.

That a man who had sketched at Persepolis and Tadmor should condescend to make studies of the oaks, beeches, and birches at Compton Friars seemed wonderful ; yet his whole heart was in the work, and a furor for sketching was developed in us all : even Miss Harbledown. “ For it is well,” as she said, “ to try one’s hand at every thing, and never let an opportunity pass ; else how should we know where our strength is ? ”

Mr. Crofton, in his kingly way, set us all to rights, and, far from murmuring, we thought it an honour to be corrected. Thus, to me,—

“ Miss Lyon, may I speak ? you look very good-humoured. If I were you, I would throw all this into the fire, and begin again on quite a new tack. Your hand is not sufficiently untied—you must give it more play. You should try to get a good touch : here, I’ll show you what I mean. D’ye see ?—d’ye see how I do it ? You’re clever, I’m sure. Make every touch tell. Give over niggling.”

How useful those hints were to me ! How I have

treasured those touches of his on scraps of waste paper, and copied them again and again ! So did Helen and Eva. In short, he put us on the right track and gave us a start. Those who had no natural taste for art dropped it when he was gone ; others worked on, and to more purpose than before.

In the midst of this art furor arrived Mr. Meggot, who had for some time been reading with a tutor, and was to go to Oxford next term. He was vastly changed — very fine, stately, and sententious, and somewhat given, I thought, to bragging. He seemed to intend doing without much trouble at Oxford what cost other men considerable effort to attain to—pull the best oar, fire the best shot, be the best batter, bowler, rower, swimmer, and whist-player. I thought it hardly likely he would excel in all these things, and that if he did, it must be at the expense of the very things he was sent to college for. But he seemed to think he should take high honours in these too ; and talked grandly of trimming the midnight lamp and tying a wet towel round his head, sporting the oak and studying till day-dawn. And yet he seemed to me as great an idler as ever I knew, and not ashamed of displaying his idleness before Mr. Crofton, the man of fortune who had voluntarily encountered perils and hardships

of all sorts. While we were all busy, Mr. Meggot would lie under a tree—unbending his mind, as he said—and sentimentally declaim some such fragment as this :—

“ Oh, how I long my careless limbs to lay
Under a plantain’s shade, and all the day
With amorous airs my fancy entertain,
Invoke the Muses, and improve my vein.”

“ Amorous fiddlestick !” said Mr. Crofton, making believe to switch him with a long nettle.

“ Waller,” said Mr. Meggot.

“ A dollar for Waller. There’s an impromptu for you. Can you invoke the Muses to as much purpose ?”

CHAPTER VIII.

COUSIN KATE.

“Kate, the prettiest Kate in Christendom.”

SOMETIMES Mr. Meggot would indulge us with his opinions of mankind, of womankind, and of the sort of woman his wife must be—a very transcendent creature indeed, and of independent fortune.

Mr. Crofton went away, regretted by all, but Mr. Meggot remained. He said carelessly he should like to see Miss Rivers.

This young lady, whom the girls oftener spoke of as Cousin Kate, was the next expected visitor. Though related to the Hartlepoons, they had never seen her. She came from a distance, and was reported beautiful and delightful. As we sat idly guessing what she would be like, Mr. Meggot asked if she were not a fortune.

“A fortune? No,” said Mrs. Hartlepool. “Don’t make yourself out worse than you are, Phil. You have never been mercenary.”

“ I thought she had been a fortune.”

“ I dare say she has something, but not enough to talk of as a fortune. She is popular because she is pleasant and engaging.”

Mr. Meggot put his hands down into the depths of his pockets, and remarked that if she were only engaging she was not likely to be engaged. Mrs. Hartlepool said that, luckily, every body was not as mercenary as he pretended to be.

Miss Rivers arrived—an uncommonly pretty, airy, sprightly creature. It struck me at first that her playfulness must be of the kind that had characterized Mrs. Montagu in the girlish days when the Duchess of Portland called her Fidget. She was lively rather than witty, but she kept people constantly amused, without saying any thing worth remembering.

Mr. Meggot seemed to weigh every word she said, and study every feature in her face; which she gave no sign of finding otherwise than flattering. We, who knew him better, were doubtful whether his opinion were complimentary. But, after all, we knew little of his thoughts; to me, at all events, it was difficult at any time to know whether he were in jest or earnest, and I had pretty good reason to know what he could do in the way of practical joking. And when I heard him

gravely telling Miss Rivers the very reverse of what he had been saying to us before she came, lauding her favourite poets, &c., I suspected he was making game of her.

I do not know whether Miss Rivers had at length an idea of this being the case; but if she liked rattling with Mr. Meggot, she certainly liked rational talk with Mr. Basil Hartlepool better, which improved my opinion of her taste. Basil was rather shy of her at first, and given to silent observation; but was gradually drawn into little discussions, in which, indeed, she sometimes betrayed how shallow she was, and made blunders which were booked by Miss Harbledown, but which Basil treated with great forbearance.

Meanwhile we had again glow-worm hunts, and orchis hunts, and listenings to nightingales, and once a charming picnic, ending with a row on a small lake. I say ending, because it ended very abruptly indeed by the boat upsetting just as Miss Rivers was stepping out of it, so that she got completely drenched. Amid exclamations of alarm and condolence, she made the best of her way, with Urith, to a cottage by the lake, whither we all less hastily followed her. And here an old woman supplied her with a change of garments, which,

indeed, could not be expected to fit her, but with which she contrived a most ingenious and becoming masquerade. A chintz gown looped up at one side over a green quilted petticoat, a short gipsy cloak, and gay-coloured handkerchief tied over her beautiful hair, made her quite "fit to paint;" and the open compliments paid her by Mr. Meggot, and the silent admiration of her cousin Basil were received with complacence. I must say something very much like flirting ensued; and her vanity made her sit down to a spinning-wheel, which had belonged to the old woman's grandmother, and play at spinning, as Miss Harbledown remarked to me, with great disgust, as a mere pretext for attitudinizing. Meanwhile the sociable came round, and into it we all packed; and much laughing and talking there was all the way home, but only a few were the interlocutors.

When we got home, Mrs. Hartlepool, who had been unable to join us, said to Miss Rivers, "Why, my dear, you look as if you were going to perform in an opera ballet;" and when she heard what had happened, she was urgent with her niece to go to bed, saying that her heightened colour and bright eyes showed a great deal of fever. But Miss Rivers scouted the idea of bed at eight o'clock, and

declared she was quite in the humour for a charade; and after some remonstrance charades were the order of the evening. I remember one was Agamemnon. Mr. Meggot made a superb Aga, with hookah and turban. But how act Memnon? Genius tramples on impossibilities. A plaster cast is placed in the background; a great amount of make-believe is required to suppose it in the far distance. Enter Basil, with travelling cap and carpet-bag. "Ha! the object of my youthful wishes is then attained! Here am I in Egypt. But soft! what see I yonder on the horizon? Day-light will disclose—sunrise cannot be far distant No, indeed, the glorious orb of day is now rising"—a lamp is surreptitiously set behind the bust from under the window-curtain, while soft music is heard behind it, from—an old guitar!

How Mr. and Mrs. Hartlepool *did* laugh! Miss Harbledown too; all of us. The Aga patronizingly clapped his hands; he was outdone; Oriental dignity was eclipsed by absurdity. I believe he said, "Mashallah," or "Bismillah," or something of that sort.

Fired with emulation, he now put in for Agamemnon. But Basil said, "No, I'll be Agamemnon—you may be Calchas." But no,

he would not be Calchas. Would Miss Rivers be Iphigenia? No, she should not like to be killed, nor to let down her back hair. Finally (all this was behind the scenes) it was decided to take another point in the King of Mycenæ's history. Basil returned to the dress circles, armed with an opera-glass. We had a very strong cast—Mr. Meggot and Miss Rivers. Make-believe was now called on to see a forest. Enter Agamemnon as a hunter, though rather of the modern school. He was hastening to pick up his game, when Miss Rivers, gracefully draped as Diana, appeared in the background, and rated him in good set terms for killing her pet stag. Mr. Meggot said afterwards she was too quick upon him—he meant to have had a soliloquy, and given us a touch of *Homer*. However, the emergency called up his readiness; they gave us a very smart dialogue, with plenty of thrust and parry. Miss Rivers worked herself up into a very spirited rage, and insisted on the sacrifice of his daughter. Mr. Meggot clapped his hand to his forehead; and the audience cried, "Agamemnon! Agamemnon!" on which he led Miss Rivers forward, and—the dame made a courtesy, the dog made a bow—so Mr Hartlepool said.

After this I believe they would have kept on all night, but Mrs. Hartlepool would have no more, but sent the young people to their rooms, just as, Mr. Meggot said, their spirits were up. She said afterwards that charade-acting was one of the things that might easily be carried too far.

Next day Mr. Meggot left us; and Miss Rivers had a cold which kept her to the house. After this it came to pass that she and Basil grew very tender to one another. Marianne told me in confidence she thought they would marry some day. I laughed, and mentioned it to Urith, who looked grave, and said, "They ought not to fancy such things, nor talk of them. Basil cannot possibly marry for some years to come, and will not be with us much longer. Otherwise I don't know that papa and mamma would have much objection."

They seemed drifting into an attachment, perhaps an engagement. I could not tell how much Mrs. Hartlepool noticed, nor how much she liked it. Her manner to Miss Rivers was always very motherly, and I thought she was influenced by the studied deference and almost officious attentions of Miss Rivers to herself and Mr. Hartlepool, which to me were less attaching than the frank, unconstrained manner of her daughters. But I believe

now that she was only indulgent to her as a niece, and desirous to let the young people have a certain amount of fair play and free action. To allow this enough, and not too much, is often a parent's puzzle, leading to mistake.

Rather suddenly Basil was summoned away. Miss Rivers looked blank, for she had just engaged to prolong her stay a little. He noticed her clouded look, and was pleased and flattered by it.

"I do hope I shall find you here when I come back," he said.

"Oh, that is so long to look forward to!" said Miss Rivers plaintively.

"Only a few weeks; so do say you will stay."

"Have I not just arranged to remain a little longer?"

"Yes, but I hope you will stay till I come back."

"That must depend."

"On what?"

"Oh, on all sorts of things. My aunt may not want me here."

"Mother!" cried Basil, in a clear, distinct voice, "would you not like Kate to remain here till I come back?"

"Oh, certainly," said Mrs. Hartlepool.

Miss Harbledown afterwards said to me that Basil had no right to draw such an answer from his mother—he left her no liberty for a negative. However, she seemed to me to speak cordially enough; and her son gave her a grateful look, and certainly was relieved by her kind assent.

He and Miss Rivers then began to talk in lowered voices, and I changed my place to be out of earshot; but I knew he was recommending her a course of reading, and, at her request, making her a list of books. She received it with an air of tender obligation, and he doubtless went away with the pleasing conviction that she was going to undertake a judicious course of study for his sake; but hardly anything could be more unpalatable to such a light mind than solid study of any sort. I could hardly help smiling when, after Basil was gone, Marianne came to me, looking much impressed, and said, in a low voice,—

“I met Kate just now on the stairs with an armful of books Basil recommended her to read. I dare say she will have a good cry when she gets into her own room.”

“A good cry indeed!” repeated Miss Harbledown, contemptuously, “Miss Rivers is pretty childish, but not quite equal to that.”

“My darling Downy,” said Marianne, winding her arm round her, “you *are* so prejudiced against Kate! You will never give her credit for being deep.”

“Oh, deep—deep as the sea,” said Miss Harbledown, in a tone that was any thing but satisfactory.

Compton Place was let this summer to a wealthy family named Brooke. Calls had been exchanged; and it was Mrs. Brooke and her daughters who had just paid their return visit when I arrived at Compton Friars. The next time they called was after Basil had left us; and as Miss Rivers had expressed a wish to see them, I went to summon her.

“At her books,” whispered Marianne. “This is her hour, you know.”

Nevertheless and notwithstanding, I went up and tapped at her door, but received no answer. Gently opening it, I looked in, and saw her enjoying a refreshing nap! Amused, but feeling guilty, I closed the door, and my doing so probably woke her. I heard a book dropped on the floor, followed by the opening and shutting of drawers and splashing of water; and then out came Miss Rivers, serene and self-satisfied after the well-spent hour. From that moment it dawned on me that she was a little humbug.

But what! may not one doze over a book? Most certainly they may, but not give out afterwards that they have had an hour's hard reading.

"What do you think of those books, Miss Rivers?" said Miss Harbledown mischievously; "those books that Mr. Basil Hartlepool recommended you. How do you like them?"

"To tell you the truth, I find them very dry," she replied. "There are no new ideas in them; nothing but rusty, musty old thoughts cleaned up and polished. Of course I am wading through them because of Basil's recommendation; but when he comes home I intend to take him to task for over-praising such writers."

"I thought Macaulay at least was an original writer," said Miss Harbledown.

"Superficial and flashy, it seems to me," said Miss Rivers. "He puts too much red in his brush."

"Have you looked into Carlyle?"

"Oh yes, and think his affectation beyond every thing. What successful pains he has taken to spoil his originally good plain English style!"

"How do you like Sir James Stephen?"

"I like the story part of his essays very well—about St. Francis of Assisi, and Loyola, and Xavier. I got aground in 'the Clapham Sect.'"

Miss Harbledown afterwards said to me she thought Miss Rivers must sleep with one eye and keep wide awake with the other.

After Basil's departure it was wonderful how flat and listless Miss Rivers became. Helen and Marianne had romantic ways of accounting for it; and of course the presence or absence of the only young man in the family does make a difference. She took less pains to dress, less pains to amuse, less pains to conform to the family rules, was generally late at prayers, and frequently at meals. Her *prestige* was impaired by it.

The Misses Brooke had called to invite the girls to luncheon; it was to be only a female party, without formality, and Miss Rivers seemed to think it hardly worth acceptance. However, as it turned out, Mr. John Brooke was at home, and he made all the difference. He and Miss Rivers were charmed with each other—she threw those artless girls her cousins quite into the shade, and returned all animation. Thenceforth her drollery and high spirits were the same as at first; she evinced the same desire to please every body; but not with the same success. Her cousins saw that her light partiality was transferred from their brother to a stranger. Therefore they cooled towards her,

though Mrs. Hartlepool's manner was unchanged, for the experience of years made her acquainted with the versatility of shallow characters. The good-humour of the girls was ruffled, without their cousin's seeming conscious of it.

Miss Harbledown said to me, "Did not I tell you so? They are now learning what she is; and a good thing for them that the disenchantment has not been postponed."

Marianne said one day, "I don't seem to care much now for Kate's staying till Basil returns. I believe she cares little for any of us."

But Miss Rivers had no intention of going while the Brookes remained, for whose society she showed a marked preference.

In a little while they all took flight for Hastings. Her dulness then returned. After a few days she announced that she was going home.

"Without waiting for Basil?" said Marianne hastily.

"Dear me, what difference should that make?" said Miss Rivers. "It would look very strange, I think, to wait on that account, and I have paid you quite a visitation already."

Urith gave Marianne a warning look, and there was dead silence. Mrs. Hartlepool then said quietly,—

“This is rather sudden, my dear, is it not?”

“Oh no, aunt; mamma has been planning for some time to go somewhere; and now, I believe, she is thinking of Hastings.”

“I hope you will enjoy yourselves there—Hastings is a very nice place.”

The sisters said not a word. Miss Rivers might have made warm friends of them, but did not. They parted with little regret; and the Hastings trip had no result.

CHAPTER IX.

BÁSIL'S LAST CHRISTMAS.

“The close-woven arches of limes
On the banks of our river, I know,
Are sweeter to her many times
Than all that the city can show.”

I LEFT Compton Friars before Mr. Basil Hartlepool's return, having spent there five happy weeks.

I have read in the popular literature of the day, which has afforded my only insight into high life, that at great houses people come and go without much said on either side, and without staying long—no leave-taking all round—just a few words to the host and hostess, and perhaps one or two besides. But Compton Friars was not a great house, nor did the Hartlepoons move in high life—they never let guests go like that! They could afford to show that they were glad when friends came, and sorry when they went; not one of them would have missed the welcome or the leave-taking

if they could help it. And so it came to pass that guests had the comfortable feeling that they were liked and would be missed, and not forgotten the next moment, or remembered only to be ridiculed. I like the old way best.

It was holiday-time, so Miss Harbledown had gone to her friends, leaving the girls more to do in her absence, Mrs. Hartlepool thought, than there was occasion for. I need not say they thought so too; but they were upon honour, and got through the impositions bravely, in half the time they would have spent over them with Miss Harbledown, "plainly showing," their mamma told them, smiling, "what they could do if they would." Then the dictionary was clapped together, the school-books were cleared away, and they clustered round Mrs. Hartlepool and me, to take part in whatever was going on.

"Oh, Bessy! you would like so to be here at Christmas! I should so like you to be here at Christmas!" Eva exclaimed.

"I like being here, whatever the season is," said I; "but my father and mother could not spare me at Christmas."

"Oh, not for once? Not if you asked them very much?"

“I should not think it right to do that; they would be so lonely.”

“Certainly they would,” said Blanche, looking as if she saw them in imagination by their lonely fire-side. “Oh, Eva, it would not be fair to them.”

But Eva said, “We have such fun here, you can't think—old Father Christmas, with icicles of curled paper—St. George and the Dragon—Tom Fool and the hobby-horse—just like the people in Brace-bridge Hall. I am sure you would like it.”

“I'm sure of that, too.”

“Oh, then, do come! Mamma, do ask her.”

“We don't know that we shall be here ourselves, my dear,” said Mrs. Hartlepool quietly.

Eva looked puzzled; but Blanche drew her off, saying,—

“We may not be alive, mamma means; people never know what may happen.”

Though this silenced Eva, it did not satisfy me, and Mrs. Hartlepool explained herself when the children were gone, by saying,—

“We don't talk about it to them yet, but it is not improbable that we shall winter in London—in old Mr. Hartlepool's house, which was let as it stood at his death. The tenant does not wish to renew his lease.”

“Dear me, that will be very pleasant,” said I. “And yet I don’t know that it will be as pleasant as Christmasing here.”

“It will be Basil’s last Christmas with us, you know, and it will save Mr. Hartlepool his cold, dark journeys here. It will be of advantage to the girls : Urith will come out, and the younger ones will have masters.”

“That will be very nice.”

And yet I had conjured up such a dream of Compton Friars as in the olden time, with doles to the poor, and cold meats and ale in the hall for all who liked them, and waits, and carols, and mummers, that a London winter seemed dreadfully prosaic in comparison. To be sure they would be nearer to me, that is to say about four miles off ; but that would be beyond a walk, except now and then at a stretch.

Meanwhile, though Mrs. Hartlepool did not love mysteries, she forbore from speaking of this to her children as yet, because it was not quite fixed, and might unsettle them, and perhaps for other reasons there was no need I should know.

And so, when the parting hour came, we took leave of one another with warmer affection than we had felt or shown yet, and I found that in quitting

Compton Friars I was leaving a good piece of my heart behind me.

Just now, the rest of that summer is a blank ; and I do not care to force memory to give up any stores relating to it, for I am persuaded they would not be worth recalling. My father and mother were not quite as much interested in hearing continually of the sayings and doings of Compton Friars as they had been the first time, and when I found this I shut myself up in a kind of dreamland. I fear my dear mother thought I found home dull in comparison ; if she did, she would not have been far wrong. One or two hints were dropped on the tendency of too much visiting and variety to unfit people for the duties of every-day life. I agreed to this very heartily, and did my best to prove that it did not apply to me ; but, after all, it may have done so. My thoughts were so continually running on pleasant places and pleasant people I must not talk about, that it was difficult to me to start and support other subjects without betraying how little in comparison I cared for them.

I was very happy though, all the same—sitting at the open window looking out on the dead wall of the brewery, but half filled with a beautiful geranium Mrs. Hartlepool had given me—rubbing my

paints, pursuing my little art with patience and neatness, and thinking all the time of Compton Friars—now of the glow-worm hunts on sultry evenings—now of a hunt for water-lilies—now of visits to poor cottages—now of copying quaint epitaphs in moss-grown churchyards—then of the various characters that had flitted by me, but most and oftenest of the dear Hartlepoons themselves. What was there weakening in this? Their lives were so harmless and healthful, their characters so transparent, their talk so cheerful and intelligent, that one could not have too much of it. At least I could not; but I can reluctantly admit now that my parents may have had more than enough sometimes of what was retailed to them at second-hand. Sometimes, if I quoted one of Marianne's jokes (she was a most amusing girl), my mother would say, "Well, I can't see much to laugh at in that," which, of course, was because the spirit had evaporated, owing to my awkwardness and inaccuracy. Then my father would smile and say, "Oh, fie, my dear, the fault must be in you!" as much as to imply, All *must* be clever that's said at Compton Friars. And my mother would reply, rather shortly, "Yes, I dare say it is, as is generally the case"—and bite off her thread. Then I could only say, crestfallen,

“ Oh, there wasn't much in it, only it amused us at the time.”

“ I doubt, Bessy, you were all in tip-top spirits, and easily amused—at any thing or nothing.”

“ Yes, mother, that was it.” And for a little while I would feel rather humbled at having been so readily amused—at anything or nothing. But, after all, is it not a great secret of happiness ?

One day I said, “ Mother, how came you and Mrs. Hartlepool to be friends when you were girls ?”

“ Because we were at school together,” said my mother.

“ But you did not make friends of all your school-fellows ?”

“ No, to be sure not. I should have had some worthless ones if I had. I was half-boarder, Bessy,” resumed she, drawing her work-basket towards her, “ and a few years older than Urith Rivers ; and it's likely we should never have had much to say to one another if she had not taken the measles just before the holidays. Her mother would not have her home to infect the rest of the family, so she was left at school while the other pupils were dismissed in double-quick time. I never went home for the holidays, for I had not a home that could be called one after the death of my parents. I had

had the measles, so there was no danger to me in being with Urith. And very happy we were together that Christmas ; we were sorry enough when the holidays were over, and ever after that we continued good friends. But after we left school we did not often see one another ; though when I got married she sent me a very nice letter and a pretty present. After she married we saw each other still seldomer. So that's all about Mrs. Hartlepool."

"What an uncommon name Urith is," said I.

"Uncommon ugly, I always thought," said my mother. "My liking for her did not make me like her name, though I dare say you think it pretty. She was called after one of the Miss Offleys of Derbyshire. I observe, whatever the conversation turns upon, you are sure to bring it round to the Hartlepoons. It is not good for you : people of one idea go mad. You ought to have more change."

"Where am I to find it?" said I. "And I'm sure I don't want any."

"Go and call on Miss Burrows."

Augusta Burrows had been my school-mother when we were children, having been at school the longest : there was little difference in our age. In early times I had rather liked her ; she was good-humoured and generous when it required no self-

denial ; had plenty of money, and often let me share her sweet things. She was the daughter of a solicitor living in Finsbury, and, now that her mother was dead, she kept house for him.

Augusta considered herself much above us, and doubtless was so. This was shown in a good-humoured, off-hand way, but it prevented my intruding on her often. Still I liked her well enough to keep up the old intimacy as far as an occasional visit went, and this just suited her.

At my mother's suggestion I went to call on her now, but found that the house was under repair, and she and her father were away, and she would not be home till winter. I did not much care about it. I had my walk for my pains. And during that walk I enjoyed uninterrupted meditations on Compton Friars.

In the autumn a letter came from Urith. It was written in high spirits. They were all coming up to the old house that had been her grandfather's; and they were one and all anticipating with delight a winter in London. I enjoyed the reflection of their happiness, and thought how pleasant it would be to have them within reach of a walk of a few miles.

The first time I could make it convenient, I went

to view the exterior of the house that was soon to contain so much happiness. It was not in a fashionable quarter ; but had evidently been the mansion of one of our wealthy merchants. It was of dark, discoloured brick, exceedingly in want of fresh painting, built round a court, in one corner of which grew a sycamore, looking curiously out of place. Into this court looked a great many tall, narrow windows, betokening plenty of rooms. The tenant had not yet removed ; and the next news I heard was that he had begged to retain it till Christmas, to which the Hartlepoons rather reluctantly consented, as Christmas is an awkward time for changing house.

So here was the pleasure of seeing them postponed. To make amends for it, my mother, when Christmas-Eve came round, said to me, "Why don't you wrap up and look in on Miss Burrows? Mr. Tremlett is coming to play cribbage with your father, and you are never very fond of him, so it will take you nicely out of the way."

This was a welcome suggestion to me ; so I started off on a clear frosty evening, with snow yet lying beside the pavement and on window-sills and railings. Though the wind was very cold, I enjoyed my brisk walk through the busy, cheerful streets,

and reached Mr. Burrows' house just as Augusta, well wrapped up, was coming out of it. She was on her way to drink tea with an old friend, and she insisted on taking me with her.

CHAPTER X.

A CHRISTMAS EVE LONG AGO *.

“On Christmas eve the bells were rung,
On Christmas eve the mass was sung.”

“It don’t make the least difference,” said Augusta. “I’m going to drink tea with old Mrs. Jeffrey,—I know I may take you.”

So there were we, the next minute, running through the snowy streets, shivering in the keen air, that cut like a knife. Turning the corner of a by-street, Augusta ran against a boy with a tray of mince-pies on his head.

“Well, I’m sure!” cried he indignantly.

“That was your fault, not mine,” said Gussy briskly. “You should mind where you are going.”

“Do let us help to pick them up,” said I, detaining her.

“Not I,” said Gussy; “what are boys made for? The pies are no worse,” and whisked me round the corner.

* This sketch appeared in the *Quiver*.

"I wonder what his master will say?" said I.

"He won't tell his master. Please don't make me swallow any more cold air. I want to be in voice to-morrow, and you'll make me lose my G."

Stopping short, she said, "Here we are," and rang the bell of a small house.

We were not kept waiting in the cold. A small maid admitted us into a passage adjoining a small parlour, from the open door of which issued a glow of ruddy firelight.

"How comfortable you look, Mrs. Jeffrey!" cried Augusta, bouncing in; on which an old lady, sitting beside the fire, turned round and regarded us with what struck me as being rather a weird look.

"What! two of you?" said she.

"This is only Bessy Lyon," said Augusta unconcernedly. "I was just coming round to you when she stepped in, so I told her I knew I might bring her."

"You were quite right," said Mrs. Jeffrey, cordially giving me her hand; though I am sure she knew no more of a Bessy Lyon than a Bessy Tiger till that minute. "Who would not welcome a friend's friend on a cold Christmas Eve?"

Our wraps were taken off and carried away by the little maid, and then we drew round the fire,

before which, deftly poised on poker and tongs, basked *two* muffins. Gussy gave an amused look at them and then at me, which I seemed not to notice.

After some chat, Mrs. Jeffrey made tea, and then we again drew round the fire, of which Gussy took quite the lion's share in the centre, with the folds of her crimson merino gorgeously spread out. By this time we were on very sociable terms.

"How well these coals burn," said Augusta. "You looked so comfortable, Mrs. Jeffrey, when we came in out of the cold; but you were deep in thought. What were you thinking about?"

"Well," said Mrs. Jeffrey, smiling, "if I'm to have a penny for my thoughts, I don't mind telling."

"Oh, do, do! You shall have the penny."

"I was thinking of a Christmas Eve a good many years ago."

"When you were a girl of my age?"

"When I was about your age."

"Was it pleasant?"

"Very. Now for my penny."

"Oh, no!—no indeed, Mrs. Jeffrey! You must first tell us all about that Christmas Eve, which I'm sure was delightful."

Smiling, she answered, "I don't think that was

in the bargain, but I've no objection. It is sometimes pleasant to talk as well as to think of old times."

"Yes, to be sure—the only thing they're good for," said Gussy, sitting still closer to the fire, and holding up her handkerchief to save her face from being scorched.

Mrs. Jeffrey gave her a screen, and then quietly said,—

"The Christmas Eve I was thinking of was the first I ever spent in Rome."

"In Rome!" exclaimed Augusta. "You don't mean to say you've ever been there?"

"Why not?" said Mrs. Jeffrey.

"Well, I don't know exactly; but it seems so extraordinary that you should ever have been in Rome! Does it not, Bessy?"

I said "No," with decision; though I must confess a truer answer would have been "Yes."

"I dare say it may seem strange to both of you," said Mrs. Jeffrey composedly, "that I should not have lived all my life where I am now; though, in truth, there is no reason why that should be the case. You know little of my life, my dear, and Miss Lyon still less. I have lived, suffered, and enjoyed a good deal in my time. My memories are my wealth."

She did not seem going to say any more about them, but Gussy goaded her on.

“But your story,—your story, Mrs. Jeffrey!” said she impatiently.

“Oh, I’ve no story. I was only speaking of a pleasant Christmas Eve at Rome. My father, you know, was an artist. We had recently lost my dear mother; he felt it very sadly; and he saw that my sister Ellen and I required a change. So he determined to put into execution what had long been a day-dream of his and of ours, and to spend a year in Rome. It required some management, you must know, for we were not very well off, and indeed want of means had previously been the great obstacle. But where there’s a will there’s a way. He worked hard at a picture, and got well paid for it; we let our house to a good tenant, and, in short, we managed it.

“The journey was delightful, of course, and gave us all a complete change of ideas. My father was a most intelligent, intellectual companion, and very fond of us. We saw whatever was to be seen worth seeing on our way; and when we reached Rome we took possession of very comfortable quarters in the Via della Ripetta, which a friend was just leaving—not smart lodgings, you know;

quite unfashionable and homely, but they suited us exactly. My father picked up some professional friends, and, in time, one or two patrons, who gave him commissions—what artists call ‘pot-boilers.’ Two or three young painters used to drop in on us pretty frequently, because they liked him so much; and they said we made such an English home. Their parents in London had recommended them to his kindness, and begged him to keep a fatherly eye on them; which was just what he did.

“Well, on Christmas Eve two of these young men, Reynolds and Morley, dropped in on us at dusk, and began to laugh and talk as usual; and one of them said, ‘Are you going to have any mince-pies to-morrow? the Romans don’t make them.’

“‘To be sure we are,’ said papa. ‘Christmas would not be Christmas without them.’”

“‘Oh, papa! what are you thinking of?’ said we laughingly. ‘We’ve no mince-meat.’

“‘No mince-meat?’ repeated he, with a droll look, ‘but what is to hinder us of it? I suppose all the ingredients are to be bought in Rome?’

“‘Yes, of course—’

“‘And I suppose you, Miss Caroline, and you, Miss Ellen, know how to put them together?’

“‘But, papa! there is not time—

“‘Fiddlestick’s ends!’

“‘Many hands will make light work,’ cried Morley. ‘Let Reynolds and me help you; we’ll stick by you to the death.’

“‘Oh, in that case,’ said we, laughing.

“‘Now then, what’s to be done first?’ asked Reynolds.

“‘First, you must go and buy the ingredients—currants, citron, suet—’

“‘But why not all go together?’

“‘Yes, why not all go together?’ chimed in Morley. ‘Let us make a frolic of it.’

“‘Put your hats on, my dears,’ said my father. ‘These young men will never know what to buy—they’ll be buying pepper instead of spice, and I don’t know what.’

“‘Yes, we certainly shall,’ said they.

“‘Fine help you are likely to be,’ said I, laughing. So there we set out, in the best possible spirits; my father taking care of me, and the young men of Ellen.”

“‘What fun!’ ejaculated Augusta, whose cheeks were blazing, either with excitement or scorching.

“‘Go on, Mrs. Jeffrey.’”

“‘The streets,’ continued Mrs. Jeffrey, warming with her subject, “the old, irregular, narrow, lava-

paved streets, now in darkness, now in a flare of light, were thronged with a curious medley of people—friars, soldiers, beggars, artisans, Trasteverini;—now a brace of shaggy Calabrian bagpipers; now a scowling Schedoni; now a party of amused English or Americans. We popped into one shop after another—buying fruit here, suet there; then to the baker's for flour. Every thing was put into a basket which Reynolds gloried in carrying. Every body was merry and good-humoured—delicious gushes of music came through church-doors; it seemed enchantment.

“Though dark, it was yet early, for the days were at their shortest. We got back to our lodgings and set to work merrily. Reynolds insisted on chopping the suet and apples; my father squeezed the lemons; I washed the currants and grated the nutmeg; Morley and Ellen contented themselves with stoning the raisins, and she accused him of eating a good many. Brandy and sweetmeats and spice were duly added, and then we pronounced the mince-meat only to require thorough mixing. Marcellina, the maid, whose eyes laughed with fun, helped me to make the puff-paste and line the patty-pans; and when the mince-pies were made she carried them to the oven.”

“So then you had nothing to do but to eat them,” said Gussy.

“We had a great deal to do first, and we did it. We set out again, and visited some of the grand old churches, crowded with people, and heard their Christmas music, which was as beautiful as any thing earthly could be. We saw the Bambino in wax-work, lying in a manger, with Mary and Joseph, and the shepherds and shepherds’ dog, and cattle, large as life, all grouped around. It was a kind of gigantic puppet-show, with a strange mixture of childishness and solemnity in it. We looked on at it as a spectacle, you know, yet could not help feeling impressed; and I think the Roman Catholics, who considered it all right, enjoyed it as a spectacle also. And then we returned to sup on some of the mince-pies, and found them excellent.—So there, Miss Augusta, is your pennyworth for your penny,” concluded Mrs. Jeffrey, smiling.

“And here’s the penny, Mrs. Jeffrey,” said Augusta, “which I call very capitably earned. I should like just such a Christmas Eve. We never have any thing like that in this stupid country.”

“You spoke of it as your first Christmas Eve in Rome,” said I, after a pause. “Did you then spend another there?”

“Ah,” said Mrs. Jeffrey, changing countenance, “I don’t like to think of the second.”

“Why not?” cried Augusta eagerly. “Do tell!”

“My dear, it was a very different thing. We had had a very pleasant spring in Rome, and a very happy summer in the mountains about Paestrina and Poli. Reynolds and Morley were there too; they were very busy with their sketch-books; my father was busy with his; Ellen and I were busy with ours. The more we saw of Mr. Morley the more we liked him. I thought, too, he liked Ellen—I mean, I thought he was becoming attached to her. She may have had some idea of the same sort, but I cannot tell; for she was not like your commonplace young ladies who chatter about love and matrimony with no bashfulness. There was no *missiness* about Ellen; if she felt pleasure in Mr. Morley’s attentions one day, she showed no wounded feeling at their withdrawal on the next. It was a good thing she did not; for, on our return from the mountains, he dropped off from us all at once, without saying why or wherefore. He had not left Rome, but he got into a different set.”

“How horrid!” said Augusta. “I think it was

very bad of him. Did you never see him any more?"

"Not for months. Meanwhile we went on in our old way; but somehow it seemed rather flat. Ellen was more serious than she had been formerly. Once or twice she told me she was longing to return to England, and to forget all about Italy—there was no place like home. The term for which we had let our house had nearly expired, so that there seemed no reason why we should not go back at the appointed time. But my father got a commission which kept him in Rome through the winter; and if my sister and I could not honestly rejoice in this, we could at any rate submit to it with a good grace.

"That winter there broke out a terrible influenza. I was told that you could not go out in London without continually meeting hearses and mourning-coaches, nor enter a haberdasher's shop without seeing the counter heaped with black, and every customer in mourning. In Paris it was as bad; and there were many influenza cases in Rome. Ellen's was one of the first. We thought she had only taken a heavy cold, and did not make much account of it till delirium set in. Then we got thoroughly frightened; and I felt how wretched it

was to be ill in a strange land. My father ferreted out an English physician. Ellen said, when he was gone, 'That man's face showed he could do nothing for me. I shall die—I shall die! Don't cry for me. I'm not afraid.'

- ◆ "These were almost her last words. Towards night she began singing, and continued an incessant wail, that was almost like a hymn without words, till stupor succeeded, which ended in death.

"It was on Christmas Eve. I had gone into the sitting-room for something, having tied a large white handkerchief over my head because of the cold; when the door suddenly opened, and Morley came in, saying in a loud, cheerful voice, 'Here we all are again, on Christmas Eve!' I turned round, and could only give him a look. It seemed to turn him to stone."

Mrs. Jeffrey here paused, and seemed swallowing her tears.

"Don't go on," said I.

"Yes, do; do, please," said Augusta.

"I told him in few words how it was with us. If ever a man's face showed grief, his did. He seemed struck."

"'Has she ever named me?' said he.

“‘Yes,’ said I. She said, ‘Tell Mr. Morley there’s no safety but in Jesus.’”

“Oh, then he was not very religious, I suppose?” said Augusta softly, after a pause.

“Perhaps not. There! you have now the history of my two Christmas Eves in Rome. You cannot be surprised at its being painful to me to speak of the second, nor at my being glad to return to dear old England; but I left some one dearer to me than all the world besides in the Protestant burial-ground.”

“Then,” said Gussy, after another pause, “you did not marry Mr. Reynolds?”

“No, indeed,” said Mrs. Jeffrey, forced to smile at the remark.

“What has become of Mr. Morley?”

“He is dead.”

Afterwards two young people, not particularly interesting, came in to supper, which was cheerful enough. One of them observed that her mince-pie was gritty.

“So is mine,” said the other; “I think it has had a tumble in the snow.”

Augusta and I exchanged a look. Just then her teeth went crunch against a stone.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BIRTHNIGHT BALL.

“ Tower’d cities please us then,
And the busy hum of men.”

THE young people who supped with us, and whom Augusta, in her off-hand way, afterwards spoke of as Methodists, had previously been to church or chapel, I forget which ; and as I took my solitary way home after parting with Gussy, I could not help thinking that a religious service was the fittest way of keeping Christmas Eve. I rather wondered that Mrs. Jeffrey had not gone to some place of worship, as she seemed of a serious turn, though very cheerful ; but I believe she was afraid of the night-air, and could not indulge in coach-hire. I do not think people observed Christmas Eve as well then as they do now, for they often chose that evening for parties and spent it in dancing. Doubtless many attended some public service, but probably they were those who did not dance at all.

I liked what I had seen of Mrs. Jeffrey and wished we were friends, to which her cordial manner seemed to invite me ; but when I asked Augusta whether I should not call, after having been entertained by her, she said with decision, "Certainly not ; you went with *me*."

That was the last I saw of either of them for a long time. Directly Christmas was over my head was full of the Hartlepoons. I gave them a week to settle in their new home, and then ventured to show my face.

But there had been a more formidable removal than I had supposed. The former occupant had been tardy in moving out, and the Hartlepoons had considered a good many things necessary for their comfort. When I entered the court, which happened to be all in shade, and therefore looked gloomy, a great van took up the access to the doorway and was being unloaded, while Edwy was intently watching the proceedings through a dirty window, and flattening his nose against the pane. Directly he saw me he rushed to the door to welcome me ; but a grand piano was being lifted in with some difficulty by three men, so as to prevent us from reaching one another ; seeing which, he rushed out of sight, and, I concluded, carried the news of my arrival with him.

As soon as I could enter the hall, which was full of luggage and litter, I was met by an elderly, business-like servant, not one of the country set, who looked hard at me, and on my inquiring for Mrs. Hartlepool, replied, "She is very busy." I said, "I am Miss Lyon. Perhaps one of the young ladies will see me."

"You can step in here, 'm,"—said she, a little more civilly, and opened a door, which she closed on me as soon as I had entered. I found myself in a small though very lofty wainscoted parlour—the same in which Edwy had been keeping watch—with tall, narrow windows and deep window-seats: and here I waited an hour. It seemed a very long one.

At first I waited patiently enough, hearing well-known voices and much running about overhead; now and then the scraping of some heavy piece of furniture, moved with difficulty. I could well believe them to be very busy, and wished I had waited a day or two longer; but still I hoped to exchange a kindly greeting before I went away.

A clock had struck as I entered the house. I told myself that the time seemed longer than it was; and just as I was insisting on this to myself, the clock struck again! Then I *knew* I had waited an

hour, and thought they must have forgotten me. I longed to run up-stairs and show myself; but what I could have done at Compton Friars I could not do here. I did not even know my way about the house, which seemed full of intricacies and echoes. "It was very uncomfortable! I had a great mind to go away, but if they knew I was there it would seem so strange. My hand was often on the bell, but I did not ring it. I opened the door a little instead, and looked out.

Helen was just passing through the hall. She cried, "Why, Bessy!" and flew to me and kissed me. She said, "How long have you been here?"

I said, "An hour by Shrewsbury clock," so' then we both began laughing.

She said, "How very odd! Did anybody know you were here?"

"Oh, yes," I said, "Edwy saw me come in, and he ran away to tell you, I thought."

"He ran up, brimful of some intelligence," said Helen, "and mamma cut him short with 'Edwy, you have such a dirty face that I won't hear a word till you have washed it.' Edwy's face is always dirty now—there's no clean place to kiss."

I began to laugh, and she said, "Is *my* face dirty?"

“You have a little speck of black on your cheek.”

“I never knew such a dirty place as London is!” cried she indignantly. “One never knows when one is clean. Do the blacks settle on *you* so?”

“Sometimes, on a day like this, when the smoke won’t ascend: you are rubbing the wrong place—let me guide your hand.”

“Oh, I must go and wash it off. Come with me and we will go up together. Mamma and Urith have just gone out, not knowing you were here; and, indeed, they must have gone at any rate, for oh, Bessy! we are so busy!”

“I dare say you enjoy it.”

“Oh yes, it’s delightful if it were not for the blacks. We shall enjoy our new quarters immensely when we get to rights.”

“When will that be? said the bells of Stepney.”

“I do not know, says the great bell of Bow. Before mamma’s birthday, I hope, for then we are determined to have a party, a dance. See what a charming room this is!” throwing open the drawing-room door.

It was so in respect of size, but exceedingly gloomy, with highly decorated ceiling and old-fashioned

mantelpiece. The furniture was of a date gone by; with much tarnished gilding and carving. I recollect it was of white satin that had become whitey-brown, trimmed with orange and dark green gimp!

“Mamma is going to send away all this antiquated stuff,” said Helen, “and have something fresh and pretty. Now, come and see mamma’s room. And this is Urith’s. And this is mine and Marianne’s. And this is the chits’.”

Two smiling faces looked up as we opened the door of Eva and Blanche’s room—and they too were dirty. They ruefully said that the blacks preferred country faces to settle on.

“The blacks know what they’re about, then,” said I; “and, after all, you only look like the ladies who wore patches in the *Spectator’s* time.”

“Oh, Bessy!” said Eva, laughing.

Then we sat down on the lids of boxes to talk, and I helped them to fold and put away some of their things. At length it was time to go, though I had not seen Mrs. Hartlepool and Urith.

My mother listened with a kind of distrustful interest to my account of them and of the house.

“They will be rather set up now, all of them, you’ll see,” said she.

“Oh no, mother—!”

“I say they *will*, and time will show which is right. If they don't invite you to their first party, I shall call them set up.”

“They know I never go to parties,” said I, with a strong hope, nevertheless, that I should be invited.

“You never go because you never are asked, and there's nobody to ask you.”

“Why now, mother, don't you disapprove of dancing? If they were to ask me, what should I wear?”

“That is not their affair. If they do ask you, you shall have a silk.”

“How will my father like that?” said I, though pleased with the idea.

“Never mind your father. I don't ask so many things of him that he should refuse what I wish.”

From this time I cast many a scrutinizing glance into the mercers' windows, and much did I meditate on the comparative merits of various colours and shades. All this while no invitation came, nor did Urith call on me. As for Mrs. Hartlepool, I knew it was out of the question, but my mother did not think so.

“Dear mother, I have no expectation or wish—our spheres are different.”

“That does not signify. Friendship is friendship; it is only those who are not friends that think about spheres.”

“So kind as they have been to me!”

“In the country, I grant you. If there is a difference in town, it will be because they are set up.”

Talk like this made the affair seem more important than it was, and I began to feel worried. My good mother could not banish it from her thoughts, for if we went out together she would sometimes plant herself before the window of one of the temptation shops and say, “There now, Bessy—that would suit you exactly, supposing you went to the Hartlepoons.”

“Too expensive, mother, I’m sure.”

“Nay, I doubt it,” and in she would go and inquire the price, and feel the texture, and examine the width, and calculate the needful quantity, while I was on thorns, being persuaded she would never buy it.

At length—only a week before the birthday, (the date of which I knew well enough,)—a dear little blush-coloured note, with silver edges, came from Urith, giving good reasons for its not being written

sooner, and cordially inviting me to the birthday party.

“There now, mother! you see they are not set up,” cried I with glee.

“Well, no; but one could never have guessed they had been in such suspense about the recovery of a near relation. And now, Bessy, let us start off for that dress at once,” said my mother, who was greatly pleased, “for much is to be done in little time.”

But yet, when I showed her my answer to Urith's letter, she said, “You have thanked her as much as if she had given you five hundred pounds. And she is only her mamma's mouthpiece. ‘Shall have much pleasure in accepting,’ would have been quite enough. Will all the other guests express such unbounded gratitude, think you?”

“The other guests will not be such friends,” said I complacently.

“Stuff! Do you think yourself the Hartlepoons' only friend? You are conceited, Bessy. But come, let us start off for the dress, for I declare I'm as full of it as you can be.”

My father coming in just before he started for the brewery, she made a spirited attack on him, which he with great good-humour answered. But

though he playfully pretended to make a great difficulty of it, and to think we were going to ruin him, I am persuaded that the bright pieces of gold he told down upon the table had already been stored in his purse for the very object they were now given for.

The trouble and pains that party cost us ! But, after all, the trouble and pains on these occasions make great part of the pleasure.

When the eventful evening arrived it was so bitterly cold ! with an east wind, hard frost, and the ground as slippery as glass. My mother assisted with fond pride at my toilette ; my father fetched a cab and accompanied me in it. We made slow progress ; horses, rough-shod, were going at a foot pace, or slipping and sometimes falling. These misadventures kept us in continual excitement.

“Another horse down ! How soon a crowd collects ! Our man seems a careful fellow. You will get in to supper, I suppose. I’m afraid, my dear, your head being uncovered may give you cold. And this dress,” taking it cautiously between finger and thumb, “does not seem to have much warmth in it.”

Though it seemed as if we never should get

there, we did at last. My father nimbly alighted handed me out, gave me a knowing smile, and disappeared. I felt embarrassed. The hall looked brilliant, now it was lighted up; there were hired waiters, quite like butlers, one of whom ushered me into the "cloak-room" where I had waited that long hour, and where "pretty Fanny," as we used to call her at Compton Friars, helped me off with my wraps and pulled out my sleeves. Next I was ushered into the tea-room, where I had green tea and a drop-biscuit; next I was ushered up the wide shallow stairs, loudly announced as "Miss Lyon," and, the next moment, found myself in a crowd of strangers, amid an incessant murmur of voices.

Mrs. Hartlepool shook hands with me at the door, said a few kind, cheerful words, and retained my hand while she looked round for Urith, caught her eye, and passed me on to her.

"Come this way, Bessy," said Urith, whom I had never seen look so nice. "Have you had some tea?"

"Oh yes, thank you!"

"You are quite late. We are just going to dance. Will you?"

"Oh no, thank you."

“I thought you never did. Then let me find you a nice seat by Miss Harris.”

But Miss Harris was led away by her partner just as we approached her, and there remained on the seat only an elderly lady whom Urith named to me in an undertone as “Miss Poulter—a very old friend and a distant relation.” She presented me to her with a few kind words, and then left us to make acquaintance.

“You don’t dance, then?” said Miss Poulter with a smile, “and yet you look young enough. I’m sure I think dancing a very good way of warming one’s self this cold weather; but waltzing, of any description, I decidedly object to.”

Two musicians, with harp and violin, now began to play delightfully. The dancers ranged themselves for a quadrille, and could hardly help backing on us sometimes.

“Miss Hartlepool has found a partner for every body but herself,” said Miss Poulter. “I hope she will find one by-and-by, and for life, too”—with a meaning smile. “How surprised I was at their coming to town! They seemed to have quite taken root in the country; but it was to bring Urith out, I suppose. That man is a green-grocer,” lowering her voice as a waiter did some-

thing to a lamp. "I know him quite well; he supplies me with Brussels sprouts. Talking of sprouts, how scarce they are this winter! Who are those two pretty girls in book-muslin dresses made up to the throat? I call that sensible in such weather. Decidedly *not* out. Hartlepoons, are they? Urith's sisters? They are much prettier than she is."

CHAPTER XII.

THE BOWER OF BLISS.

“Haste thee, nymph, and bring with thee
Jest and youthful jollity.”

I WAS looking at the sweet girls with great complacence, when Miss Poulter, who seemed to consider me a useful intelligencer and safe listener, resumed with—

“Who is that sharp-looking young man talking to Urith?”

“Mr. Meggot.”

“Humph! Seems to think enough of himself.”

Presently he passed from Urith to Helen, and evidently began pressing her to dance. Though I could not hear a word, I liked watching the dumb show, he was so pliant and easy. There was evidently some raillery going on that amused them much; then he carelessly and gracefully led her to her place and I enjoyed looking at their dancing. It reminded me of a line in an old song:—

“ Like waving corn her mien.”

Miss Poulter's reflections were different. She said, “ Miss Helen Hartlepool resembles the Venus de' Medici in one thing—she has large feet—but she knows how to handle them neatly.”

I said, “ If they are like those of the Venus de' Medici, I should think they must be just what they ought to be—which she herself is, to my mind. She is such a sweet girl.”

Miss Poulter touched my arm and softly said, “ Another greengrocer.” I looked and saw a man carrying a tray of negus, which it required great strength to support so long with outstretched arms, while people helped themselves leisurely. When he came to us, Miss Poulter entered into conversation with him, which I thought cruel of her, and then took a second glass. The poor man seemed to think this neither the time nor place for her inquiries, and abruptly passed, looking red in the face and ready to drop.

“ It really must be quite refreshing, you know,” said Miss Poulter, turning to me, “ after a day of sordid care in a little mean shop, with perhaps a poor dinner, and two babies in a cradle, to step out of it all, clean shaven and spruce, into a scene like this, well warmed and lighted, with lively music,

and where, as Byron says, the lamps shine on fair women and brave men—at least we'll suppose them so!—and all in the way of earning money, not spending it. People talk of the privations of the poor, but I think they have their privileges too. May I trouble you to put down my glass?"

I was quite glad to do so, because it gave me the opportunity of changing my place; and Blanche, bright and light as a fairy, seized my hand and said energetically,—

"Bessy, don't go back! come here into what Basil calls the Bower of Bliss," and she led me into a prettily-draped recess, with a low couch running around it, where we could look at the mazy scene from the loopholes of retreat, and where Mrs. Hartlepool and then Urith had a few pleasant words to say, and one or two pleasant people came and went. I was again asked to dance, but had quite made up my mind I did not want to do so.

By and by Mr. Basil Hartlepool came to us, and said,—

"Miss Lyon? how nice! I am come to rest my weary, dislocated frame in the bower of repose, and you two will be cushions for my exhausted mind. I'm very hungry too. Blanche, those refreshment-

men are overlooking us most unhandsomely. Go and draw their attention to us; we want something to recruit our strength."

Blanche laughed and obeyed his bidding, and presently we were all supplied. Mr. Meggot, who had previously greeted me with a stony stare, now sauntered up, and said in a languid voice,—

"What are you people after?"

"Eating on the sly. Don't tell."

"Give me some, or I'll peach."

"All gone. More to-morrow."

"You villain."

We all laughed. Basil then took my glass, and said, with a dolorous sigh, he supposed he must now return to the field of battle. He thanked us much for having assuaged his sufferings.

After this, Marianne flew to us, all smiles; but had scarcely settled down like a snow-flake beside me, when some one came to ask her to dance; and who should he be but her cousin Tom! He had arrived unexpectedly, and came in with quite a whiff of sea freshness about him; eyes burning bright, and colour like carmine. Marianne coloured vividly, she was so surprised and glad to see him. He immediately said, "I've no partner—be mine! be mine!"

“I’m engaged to Mr. Clayton,” said she regretfully; and her partner came up that moment to claim her.

“Oh, Mr. Clayton will excuse you, I dare say. We haven’t seen each other for a long while, sir,”—which tickled Mr. Clayton so that he laughed immoderately.

“I don’t know what to say about it,” said he; “the honour and pleasure of dancing with Miss Marianne Hartlepool will be quite as great to me as to you.”

“Oh, excuse me, that cannot be,” said Tom. “I’ll explain it all to you another time. Here’s Miss Lyon unprovided with a partner. Miss Lyon, Mr. Clayton,” and away he led Marianne, in spite of her remonstrating.

Mr. Clayton said to me quickly, “Are they engaged?”

“Oh, no, I’m sure they are not,” said I. “She’s too young.”

“I don’t know about that,” said he laughing. “May I have the pleasure—?”

“Oh no, thank you; I don’t dance.”

So then he walked off, and amused himself with hanging about Tom for some time afterwards, making as though he were going to remonstrate, by beginning, “But, Mr. Hartlepool!”—“But, Mr.

Thomas!"—"But, Mr. Tom!" which Tom pretended not to hear.

Most of the rest of the evening is lost in the haze of distance. At supper, during a great buzz of voices, and noise of spoons, forks, and plates, greengrocer John, with a champagne bottle in his hand, whispered, "The gentleman's waiting, Miss;" and as I was near the door, I hastily left my place, which was immediately filled by some one who had been standing, and escaped to the tea-room. There I found my dear father waiting for me, sure enough, and very cold, though he made light of it. When we stepped into the outer air, where a cab was in waiting, I found there had been a heavy fall of snow; and we did not get home till what my father called "almost too early to go to bed."

My kind mother had caudle ready for us, and said, "Don't let it cool; you can tell me to-morrow of your doings."

So I obeyed instructions, went to bed warm, and sadly overslept myself next morning; but my father went off to business at the usual time.

Dear creatures! when I think of them both, my eyes fill with tears. How kind they were to me! How indulgent, generous, and self-denying! I

thought a good deal more, at the time, of the brilliant party than of their goodness ; but now, the lighted rooms, the delightful music, the various and pretty dresses, the graceful movements, the playful sayings, have all died out of memory—disappeared with that winter's snows. My parents' goodness lives as fresh as ever.

I felt quite jaded when I rose, and was horrified to find how late it was. My mother was sitting at work beside a cheerful fire, with my breakfast spread on the table. Outside all was buried in snow. She was afraid I had taken cold. I stoutly denied it, but she said,—

“ Why, you are as hoarse as the frog in the song. You must keep in the house till your cold has gone off.”

This was not a very disagreeable remedy, except that it prevented my calling on the Hartlepoons ; but my mother said,—

“ Depend on it, they will have plenty of callers without wanting you, and you can talk the party over with me ;” which I did very thoroughly. At last I thought my mother had had enough of it, though I had not ; and then I applied myself to plain work, which I felt more in the humour for just then than reading. Besides, I owed my mother

my best assistance in measuring and cutting out, when she had lately worked so indefatigably for me; and my cold made me glad of employment that could be carried on at the fireside.

Meanwhile my father daily brought us home dismal newspaper accounts of shipwrecks and disasters at sea, fires, robberies, distress among the Spitalfields weavers, low fevers in Essex, &c., and my mother used to cry, "God help the poor souls!" and brood over their trials, which made our fireside comforts seem more precious. Very kind, too, was she to the poor, according to her means, and in minutiae that would not have occurred to many housekeepers. A cup of hot tea, the last slice of a loaf, a basin of broth or arrowroot, a potato, a shred of cold meat, comforted many a poor wretch out of work. It was in talking at the door to one of these, who would by no means set foot inside, that she caught a severe cold, which grew worse as mine got better.

Thus our cases were reversed, and very much we coddled and petted one another. At length she became well enough for me to look after the Hartlepoons, which she proposed herself, saying,—

"They will think it strange, my dear, that you have not been near them, not knowing how poor'y

you have been, nor how occupied and anxious I have made you. Only wrap up well, and give my kind love to Urith," meaning Mrs. Hartlepool, whom she spoke of but rarely by her Christian name.

"Ay, wrap up well, Bessy," added my father, "for good people are scarce, and this nasty influenza has set all London sneezing."

Fortified with extra wraps I set forth, glad to breathe the open air once more, which, compared with what it had been, felt very pleasant and refreshing. "The ways were foul," however, as Shakespeare says, and a fog coming on which rapidly grew thicker, so that when I entered Mr. Hartlepool's courtyard the air was almost the colour of pea-soup.

A disconsolate-looking man-servant, evidently with a bad cold, opened the door, and answered my inquiry for Mrs. Hartlepool with,—

"Oh! ma'am, she's so ill!—we're all of us ill. Mistress is in bed. Miss Helen is in bed. Miss Eva and Miss Blanche keep their room. Miss Hartlepool is nursing Master Edwy in the measles."

At the same moment Marianne called over the banisters, in a hoarse and rather cross voice,—

"Timothy, do shut the door! How can you

think of keeping it open? Oh, Bessy!" and, running down, she hastily took my hand and drew me into the little room, where there was a good fire. With a wadded hood over her head and shoulders, and a handkerchief held to her nose and mouth, she certainly looked deplorable.

"We're all as bad as can be," said she hoarsely, "mamma worst of all. She *would* do too much for us all, and so is now laid up herself. You cannot think what a strait we are in. That selfish Fanny has taken this inconvenient time to leave, without warning, saying her aunt wants her, and we never knew she had an aunt. Dr. Grey has tried to get us a nursing sister or professional nurse, but they are all engaged or ill. So unfortunate, too, Edwy's taking the measles just now. We can't think where he caught them. Urith is obliged to shut herself up with him, for fear of carrying the infection to Eva and Blanche. I am the only one well."

"You?" said I, smiling; "why, you ought to be in bed too. Can I be of any assistance to you? I will gladly come and do my best."

"Oh, will you?" said she joyfully. "We shall all be so glad! Mamma said, only this morning, 'If we had but Bessy Lyon—'"

“I have been ill myself, and my mother has since been *very* ill, or I should have been here sooner—”

“Perhaps Mrs. Lyon cannot spare you.”

“Oh, yes, she can now. It was she who suggested my coming. Well, then, I will go home and tell her how things are, and return immediately.”

“Oh, Bessy, you are *so* good!” kissing me, with a tear in her eye.

“How is Helen?”

She could not help smiling. “Oh, Helen is in bed, with an unlimited supply of oranges. You never knew such a girl.”

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT CAME OF THE PARTY.

“ Edward will come with you, and pray
With speed put on your woodland dress.”

WORDSWORTH.

SO this was what came of the party—the whole family invalidated ! To be sure there were plenty of others in like case. For my part, I could not be thankful enough that I had battled through my attack, first in time to nurse my mother, and next to be of any use or comfort to the Hartlepoons.

When my mother learnt how ill they were, and how much they desired to have me, she most kindly hastened me back when I had put a few things together, charging me to tell Mrs. Hartlepool how sorry she was for her.

What a week it was ! for after the eighth day they were all convalescent and cheerful ; but during that time there had been some danger and much anxiety. I had plenty of running about from one

to another, all coveting my presence when others could dispense with it, in a way that was very flattering. The young ones chiefly wanted amusement and confinement to one temperature ; Mrs. Hartlepool was very ill, but readily submitted to strong measures for speedier recovery, and did not lose heart at all ; she was very cheerful. When the invalid girls were allowed to come and see her, they were all perfectly happy ; Edwy was taking his complaint lightly and going on well ; we all looked on Urith as a martyr to him, but she was a very merry one.

We had plenty to say of the party, and many were the droll things there were to tell of it. Mrs. Hartlepool said the girls might make the most they could of it—she should not be in a hurry to give another.

When I went away, their affection and thankfulness were quite beyond what my services deserved ; was not it a joy and a privilege to be a comfort to them ? Mrs. Hartlepool said, “ Your thinking so does not make us less your debtors.” It was very gratifying to be so esteemed and valued.

I was glad to get home again too ; and I tried to make up to my father and mother for my absence. My mother was full of sympathy

now, so that the next few weeks were very happy.

Then came a note from Urith, saying, "Edwy is much better. Dr. Grey says nothing will now do him more good than a fortnight at Compton Friars. Will you, dear Bessy, go down there with him and me? Mamma says she can trust us if we have you."

I liked the idea extremely, and my mother saw no objection except the possibility of damp beds, and a chill, draughty house; but I told her I was sure the dairy-woman left in charge kept every thing aired, and that the house, when shut up, was as warm as need be.

It *was* very draughty though, as we found when we got down there on a mild February afternoon. Mrs. Bennet had not expected us, and seemed much put out. She said, "If I had but knowed you was coming, ladies, things should have been much nicer." Urith said it did not signify, if she would make good fires and let us have early tea. This she did, bustling about much more than was necessary; and when Urith asked if her bed was dry, she said it had been slept in every night lately. On being asked by whom, she said a cousin had spent a few days with her; which Urith did not much like.

However, as she said to me afterwards, she supposed her mamma did not doom Mrs. Bennet to solitary confinement all the winter. She asked if the cousin was there still. Mrs. Bennet said, "No; gone away. How many eggs should she boil?" And afterwards, when sedulously laying the cloth and laying on it every eatable she could produce, she stood at pause to tell us that the hen-roost had been robbed—by two-legged foxes—and farmer Brown's watch-dog had been poisoned, and some ill-looking fellows were hanging about the neighbourhood, and had come to the back-door to beg very importunately, on the plea of being out of work, and she had great difficulty in getting rid of them.

"I told them there was a man in the house," said she; on which Urith said, "Oh, but you should not have said that." She said she had been frightened at them, and there were strange whistlings sometimes o' nights. "And the music keeps playing by itself." An Æolian harp had been left in a window.

I certainly felt rather alarmed, but Urith was not in the least so; on the contrary, she called it romantic, and talked till she made me think it so. After a very cosy evening we went to bed, persuading ourselves we were like Mrs. Radcliffe's heroines in some old castle.

Shut into my room, however, which was not my old one, but Helen's, to be nearer Urith's, I felt a little eerie, and was at length panic-stricken by a prodigious *bang!* which I took for a report of a pistol in the room below. Urith called out, laughing, "Did you hear that harp-string?" so then my fears were allayed. An old single-action harp had been left in the house, as being unworthy to appear in London. After that we had no alarms, either from whistlings or the hooting of owls.

What a pleasant fortnight it was! The country, it is true, was in undress; the trees bare of leaves; but Urith taught me to admire their beautiful tracery, from the sturdy trunk to the smallest twig. The landscape was by no means without verdure, for the trunks of many trees were covered with bright pea-green moss, and there were also many evergreens.

Edwy daily collected crumbs for the birds, of which there were numbers; the boy was in a paradise, and rapidly regained his good looks. He said his lessons to Urith with great regularity.

We had a singular rencontre the very day after our arrival. Turning into a sheltered lane, we came suddenly on a gentleman. Edwy exclaimed, "Phil!" and seized hold of him. He started as if shot.

“Urith!” exclaimed he, “what an unexpected pleasure! Why, you must have dropped from the skies! Where *did* you come from?” And he took off his hat to me very politely.

When Urith, who was greatly surprised, had explained, he said, “Well, this is delightful. I happened to be in the neighbourhood of Littlecompton, and could not help turning off the road to look at the old place, never expecting to find any one in it, except, of course, the people who take care of it. You have left town early. Are you going to stay long?”

“Oh, no, only a fortnight. Dr. Grey thought Edwy wanted country air, so Miss Lyon and I came down with him.”

“Well, I was lucky to stumble on you. It was most unexpected—most unexpected!”

“I’m sure it was to me,” said Urith laughing.

“May I attend you back?”

“Oh, by all means. Perhaps you will lunch with us? we dine early. I believe there is nothing but mutton and potatoes.”

“What can be better? I delight in mutton and potatoes, baked, boiled, or roasted.”

He spoke more heartily than I had ever known him do before, and was all the pleasanter; though

somehow I could not be quite sure the heartiness was not got up. Urith, who knew him so much better, had no impression of the kind. She made him heartily welcome, and in five minutes he was at home.

“There,” said he, “I’ve hung up my hat on the old accustomed peg, and laid my stick in the old familiar corner. Mrs. Bennet looks quite scared at having one more to provide for. Perhaps she thinks I shall eat more than my share, but I’ll be upon honour.”

“There’ll be plenty for you,” cried Edwy, “for I’ll dine on the cold meat, and I dare say Miss Lyon will.”

“Well said, Edwy, as far as your own share is concerned ; but I by no means intend to eat up Miss Lyon, or let Miss Lyon eat *me*”—which Edwy thought an excellent witticism, and repeated afterwards.

It was a very amusing dinner, as well as a very nice one. There was no occasion for the cold meat, and the mutton could not have been better dressed. Mr. Meggot carved superbly, and attended to us with almost a superfluity of politeness. We were water-drinkers, and had only one bottle of wine ; but Mrs. Bennet brought in some of her own foaming beer, which Mr. Meggot pronounced excellent.

He talked all sorts of nonsense, and sense too ; more than I had given him credit for possessing. Urith and I concluded he would go soon after dinner ; instead of which, when we drew round the fire he seemed to find it so comfortable as to have no intention to stir. Still the talk ranged over every variety of subject ; and Urith and I took up our work, while Edwy drew pictures on his slate.

At length Urith said, " How far shall you get on to-day ?"

" What do you mean ?"

" You are on a walking tour, are you not ?"

" Oh! Yes. I was so desperately fagged ; and wanted a little change."

" Where did you sleep last night ?"

" At —hum ; I forget the name of the place. My memory plays me such tricks now, from being overtaxed, you know. Sometimes I forget people's names ; know their faces quite well, but can't for the life of me remember who they are. It makes a fellow look enormously awkward. There was a man I met at your party : I met him a week after, and couldn't have told his name to save my life."

" Who could he have been ?"

“ Can't tell you, even now. He danced with the pretty girl in pink.”

“ Pretty girl in pink ! Who *can* you mean ?”

“ Can't tell you. A very pretty girl, though her nose was a little awry, and she had the least in the world of a squint.”

Urith now laughed outright, and declared he must be dreaming : there was no young lady answering the description. But he protested there had been, and appealed to me. I could recollect no such person.

“ Phil ! you're inventing !” cried Edwy, making a mock assault on his shoulders, and pounding them with his fat little hands.

“ Inventing, sir ? Do you know you've inflicted a deadly wound on my honour ? I dare you to single combat in the hall, with sofa-cushions.”

Off they ran, and a fine noise they made ; and after some time they returned out of breath. Meanwhile Urith said to me,

“ Can you make out who Phil means ?”

“ Not in the least.”

When he came back the conversation took quite a different turn. It was now growing dusk. Urith said,—

“ You will take tea with us, I hope, before you

go? We always have it early. Where shall you sleep to night?"

He clasped his knee with his hands, and began rocking himself and smiling.

"I suppose you have heard of the man who said, 'Where I breakfasts, I dines, and where I dines, I sups.'"

"Ah," said Urith, laughing, "but that will make it too late for you to reach your destination, unless you sleep at the 'Fox and Crow;' besides, we do not sup."

"Perhaps I shall sleep at the 'Fox and Crow,' since you aren't so pressing. To say truth, I have stretched out a good deal to-day, and I don't feel inclined to go much farther. I suppose I could not have the bachelor's hole?"

"Quite impossible," said Urith, with decision. "It is locked up. Besides, we have no spare bed-linen."

"Some of Mrs. Bennet's homespun——"

"No, no, Phil. Mrs. Bennet's properties must not be encroached upon, and I don't think mamma would like our having any visitors—especially gentlemen."

"I'm a dangerous fellow, I suppose; a suspicious character."

“Perhaps it was you who robbed the hen-roost!” cried Edwy, renewing his assault and battery.

“Hen-roost indeed! When I take to robbing, it shall be something of more consequence than a hen-roost. I only drop little boys into water-butts.”

And he carried Edwy off in his arms, in spite of his kicking and laughing violently. He set him down in the hall and shut the door upon him, which Edwy immediately opened; and he was going to charge Mr. Meggot with fury, when Urith told him to be quiet, and look over his tables—it was repetition day. Edwy immediately sat down to his arithmetic, and Mr. Meggot stood before the fire.

“I’m afraid of sitting down again,” said he, “since you won’t pity the sorrows of a poor young man, whose trembling feet have brought him to your door. One gets so awfully stiff and disinclined to stir after a long tramp in the cold.”

“Ah, you want to work on my compassion.”

“I want to protect you and Miss Lyon.”

“Oh, we’re not at all fearful.”

“But you really should be. Did I ever tell you what happened to two young ladies in a lone farmhouse?”

“Don’t, please, if it is shocking.”

“He’s making it!” cried Edwy, looking up from his book, and then plunging into it again.

“(Edwy!—) I suppose you are returning to Oxford.”

“Do you know, I am getting very sick of Oxford. My father ought to allow me more than he does. I can’t keep up with the other fellows; and they’re a very worldly set.”

“Hardly worth trying to keep up with, then. But surely, Phil, there is a better set: nay, you know there is; and only think what expectations your father and mother have formed of you.”

“Oh, bother their expectations; I don’t see why all the expectations should be on one side. I expected to be more on a par with other men, instead of being always behindhand.”

Urith looked very grave, and said, “I should hope your better feelings —”

“Oh, yes, my better feelings,” said he ironically. “I wonder where I’ve left them. I’d better advertise—‘Lost, stolen, or strayed, a gentleman’s better feelings. The individual who restores them shall receive the reward of one penny.’ Well, I believe I really must be on the tramp now. There’s a

gang of gipsies in the neighbourhood ; the sooner they tramp the better."

"How do you know?"

"I saw them boiling their caldron under the hedge ; very likely it had some of your fat fowls in it. If they molest you, recollect I warned you. Well, then, as Don Whiskerandos says,—

" ' O matchless excellence ! and must we part ?
Well, if we must, we must ; and in that case
The less that's said, the better.' "

"How affecting," said Urith, laughing. "Well, good-bye, Phil ; I'm really very sorry not to be able to ask you to stay——"

"Oh, Urith, Urith ! Don't tell fibs."

"It really is true ; but I should be still more sorry to displease mamma. Indeed you know it is impossible."

"Yes, yes, I was only in joke ; and you know how to take one as well as any body. I had not an idea of staying ; how could I have ? You know I had not the least idea you were here—never was more surprised. Good-bye ; and thank you for a very pleasant afternoon. I don't know when I've enjoyed myself so. I'm sorry I've put you out ; only you made me so comfortable that I could not help staying on and on ——"

“You didn’t put me out ——”

“Oh, well, I’m glad to hear it. How surprised my uncle and aunt will be when they hear of it! Give my love to them both. Love and kind regards all round in due proportion. Ladies know best what the due proportion is. Uncommonly dull at college without any ladies. This little snatch of female society has been quite restorative. Well, good-bye once more. Good-bye, Miss Lyon” (shaking hands very cordially)—“Good-bye, old chap. Learn your book and be a good boy.”

CHAPTER XIV.

MYSTERIES AND HISTORIES.

“Is he gone, Edwy?” said Urith, when her little brother returned to us.

“Oh, yes,” said Edwy, “but we had some more fun first. He had another glass of Mrs. Bennet’s beer, because, he said, you would give him no tea; and he shut me into Timothy’s dark closet, but he couldn’t lock it, because there was no key: Phil’s famous to play with sometimes.”

During the remainder of the evening we talked of little but this unexpected rencontre, which there was not much to make of but that it *was* unexpected.

“Perhaps mamma will say I ought to have made no difficulty about taking him in—*that* will be very disagreeable,” said Urith, “because I only did so on her account. A cousin is almost the same as a brother—not quite, though. He certainly looked very jaded. I should say he had evidently been

overworking his brain, from his memory failing so about common things. But I did not like the way he spoke of his father and mother."

This was our only visitor, except the new clergyman, Mr. Richfield, who, chancing to see Urith, concluded the family had come down, and left his card for Mr. Hartlepool. We met him afterwards, and she explained. He seemed a very nice person, quite different from the tedious old vicar, who had died in the autumn. I liked his sermons very much, and had a good deal of talk with Urith about them. She thought he laid too much stress on faith, and yet exacted too rigorous practice. I did not. The Hartlepoons had always been a very prosperous family, without crosses or losses, and hardly realized the void that nothing but religion can fill, or the comfort that nothing but religion can supply. When my mother first said something of this to me, I was loath to admit it, and yet had a dim consciousness that it was the case.

We took a longer walk than usual, the last day, along the uplands and through the woodlands. The wind was south-west, delightfully mild and refreshing. I was inhaling it with enjoyment, when Urith said, "Look at that black cloud! we must race for it: a heavy shower is coming on."

We ran down the steep slope, but, before we reached the little dell beneath, were caught in as heavy a rain-storm as I ever knew. Urith said, breathless, "There is a little cottage under those trees; let us take shelter in it."

When we reached it we rapped smartly at the door. Some one inside was slow in opening it; and, when she did so, held her apron to her face, as if afraid of the draught.

"Will you give us shelter, please?" said Urith. "Dear me, Fanny! is it you?"

Fanny seemed in no haste to answer her, but shut the door as soon as we had entered, and pushed chairs towards us somewhat coldly. Then she returned to some ironing.

"How do you do, Fanny?" said Edwy.

"How do you do, sir?" said Fanny.

"I'm better, thank you," said Edwy.

"I'm glad to hear it, sir," said Fanny, going to the fire to change her iron.

"You left us at sad disadvantage," said Urith; "you have not found a place, then?"

"I'm *in* my place," said Fanny, looking firmly at her for a moment. "I'm nursing my grandfather."

"Why, Fanny, you're married!" said Edwy, in

his open, off-hand way. "You've a ring on your finger."

She blushed vividly, and said, "Yes, sir, I am."

"Who to?"

"Ah, that's telling."

I was sorry that Urith had not asked her, for she could hardly have answered her so bluntly, but yet it seemed rather in play.

"Grandfather's knocking for me," said she, setting down her iron, and going up-stairs. She did not come down again; and as the shower, though violent, was short, we went away without waiting for her; Urith and Edwy going to the foot of the narrow stairs and calling out, "Good-bye, Fanny—good-bye—much obliged."

She answered civilly, "Good-bye, ma'am—good-bye, sir—I should have been down in another minute—I can't leave grandfather."

"How strange she was!" said Urith, as we went home. "She used to be the pleasantest girl—but she is greatly altered. I suppose her marriage has had something to do with it; we never knew she was engaged."

She afterwards asked Mrs. Bennet who Fanny had married, but she said it was news to her; she always kept herself to herself, because mistress liked it.

Edwy was now quite well, and Urith and I were wonderfully freshened by our fortnight in the country. We returned to London the next day, and I went straight home, where, as it happened, I was wanted, for my mother was looking out for a new servant. Two or three weeks passed before we were settled; meanwhile the Hartlepoons were going out a good deal, and Miss Keith was staying with them. Miss Harbledown was making her pupils work very hard, and they had various masters.

Just as I was thinking of calling, a line from Urith told me they were all returning to Compton Friars. Her sisters were flagging, and her mamma did not get rid of her cough; country air was likely to do more for them than medicine. I was sorry not to see them before they went, but it could not be managed. My spring fortnight had to serve for my summer visit.

I suppose the gayest lives have intervals of dulness, and that most lives have but intervals of brightness. Certainly the bright spots in my life stand out as little shining specks from a sombre gray background—or, rather, a *quiet gray background*; I recall the word *sombre*.

We had much trouble in suiting ourselves with a young servant, and then much trouble in training

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her. But, after all, she repaid the trouble ; and I doubt if there is any task that a woman may look on with more unalloyed satisfaction than that of training a young girl into good habits and principles. The influence may extend long beyond a lifetime.

As the days lengthened, my father and I took evening walks together ; but I observed with regret that he tired sooner than formerly.

One day, glancing over a newspaper, my mother exclaimed impatiently, "That man again!" and threw it aside.

"What man?" I asked in surprise.

"Mr. Hewson, a man you know nothing of, Bessy."

"Has he done any thing wrong?"

"Wrong? no. He keeps his carriage, that's all."

After a short pause I said, "I cannot see what difference that makes to us."

"Of course you cannot ; the only difference is, that if I had done as Mrs. Hartlepool wished me, that carriage would have been mine."

"Oh, mother!"

"It's quite true. If I had accepted him, I should now be better off than Mrs. Hartlepool."

“Why did you refuse him?” said I, my heart beating fast.

“Because I did not like him. But he is a very good sort of man, and has been getting up and up, till now he keeps his carriage.”

“Surely you don’t regret—” I began, and stopped short.

“No, Bessy; nor have ever done so for a moment; your father is worth a thousand of him. In fact, I never liked the one, and dearly love the other. But it is curious how some people get on, always with the wind in their sails, and others toil on, always against wind and tide.”

“Does my father know——”

“Not a word. Why should he? The man paid me the highest compliment he could, of offering to make me his partner for life; and as I did not accept it, there would have been meanness in telling. I need not have told now; but things escape one sometimes.

“You told Mrs. Hartlepool.”

“*He* told her, because she was his well-wisher, and he hoped she would influence me. She did her best, because she thought it would be a good thing for me; but when she found I thought other-

wise, she should have desisted, instead of keeping on a little too long."

"You quarrelled then?"

"Nothing of the sort. Don't ever fancy that I and Mrs. Hartlepool ever quarrelled. She only urged me rather beyond my patience; but I know very well she meant it for the best.

"And I dare say," continued my mother, "she thinks the event proves it. But yet she herself made a match of pure affection, which was what I did; only some people might say she could afford to do so, and I could not. Never mind, Bessy, if affection is *all* people have to start upon, the imprudence may be great; but to marry without affection is worse than imprudence—it is sinful."

"I am sure of it, mother! And what a good man my father is! How kind, how unselfish!"

"Mrs. Hartlepool never said any thing to you about it, then?"

"Not a word, oh, no. She was not likely to do so."

"Well, so I suppose."

"I am glad you have told me, mother. I like so to know all about you."

She kissed me without speaking. I took up the newspaper when she had left the room, and looked

for the name of Hewson. At length I found it in a law-court case to recover damages from another gentleman, whose coachman had driven against his carriage and injured it. He was spoken of as of the firm of Hewson and Barker, and lived in Finsbury Square.

The next time I passed through Finsbury Square, to call on Augusta (who, as usual, was out), I could not help looking with interest at the house that might have been my mother's. The carriage was at the door; an elderly lady and two younger ones swept down the steps and entered it. As far as personal appearance went, my mother had the advantage of Mrs. Hewson. "The carriage went off with a bound," and I could not help remembering some nursery lines of Jane Taylor's about "little Anne and her mother."

CHAPTER XV.

FACES IN THE FIRE.

“Friends with joy my soul remembers—
How like quivering flames they start,
When I fan the living embers
On the hearthstone of my heart !”

LONGFELLOW.

AND so the summer passed away without my seeing Compton Friars ; and Urith only wrote to tell me of a succession of visitors, and of the great trial of parting with Basil, and of Miss Harbledown's leaving them for a much more lucrative situation she was quite deserving of, and how much they missed her.

It was in the autumn when she wrote, in great agitation, to tell me that Mrs. Hartlepool was dangerously ill, and to beg me to go to them. Of course I made instant preparations to do so ; and my mother and I shed tears as I packed my things to start in the afternoon stage.

Oh, how sorry I was ! If she should die, what

would they do without her? they who knew so little of death and pain and sorrow! They seemed so unprepared. Oh, I hoped it would please God to spare them this affliction. I prayed in my heart that He would, as I journeyed.

In general, every thing on the road interested or amused me, but it did not do so now. There was no cheerful group awaiting me when I alighted, as of old. When I reached the house, Helen and Marianne met me in the hall. They looked stricken. We kissed each other. I said, "How is she?" Helen could only say, "No better;" her eyes filled with tears.

I laid aside my bonnet, and said, "Now make whatever use of me you like; I have a dress that will not rustle." We went to the door of Mrs. Hartlepool's room; Marianne softly opened it. Urith, who was standing by the bed, made a warning sign of silence, and only gave my hand a squeeze—the younger girls went away.

When I looked at Mrs. Hartlepool I hardly knew her. It is no use going over it all—I do not like to think of it. It was a fiery ordeal. Oh! a stoic in the gout may profess pain to be no evil, if he will; but there are some sorts of pain that *no* sincere person can deny to be evil. And yet

even such extremities of pain our firm and compassionate God sees to be not the worst of evils : no ! Sin is the only evil that is nothing but evil— and these pains are sent as sharp but needed remedies for sin. Here was a family that had known nothing of such discipline but by the hearing of the ear ; but now their eyes saw it, and saw the hand that sent it.

There was no sign of hope. The night after my arrival was her worst : Urith and I sat up all night. About five o'clock in the morning, Urith, exhausted by previous watching, lay down in the dressing-room, while the awe-stricken Helen took her place. Mr. Hartlepool's distress was deplorable, but he was obliged to go to his business all the same.

I afterwards learnt that Helen and Marianne were of the greatest comfort to him ; devoting themselves to him, while Urith never left her mother. The younger ones were good as gold — not a noise in the house, not a laugh, not a smile.

Urith afterwards told me that I relieved her of a load of responsibility by my presence. She had been accustomed to refer every thing to her mother. It quite stunned her to be deprived of that direction. I was older, more composed, and knew more of sickness, though I had never seen a case like this.

I could give her many little helps and hints ; she paid me with such thankful looks !

Once, when she was in the dressing-room, and I was sitting beside Mrs. Hartlepool, whose eyes were closed, I clasped my hands on my lap and silently prayed. When I looked round, Mrs. Hartlepool's eyes were resting on me.

Another time she tried to speak, but Urith could not tell what she said. She put her ear close down to her lips, to hear what they whispered. Looking up at me, she said, "It sounds like 'hymn-book—my mother's.'"

"Do you know where her mother's hymn-book is?"

"Yes, I have seen it on a shelf in the dressing-room."

"You had better fetch it."

Mrs. Hartlepool, weary with pains, had again shut her eyes, but she re-opened them and looked satisfied when Urith returned with the thick little calf-bound volume.

She whispered "Mark."

I took the book from Urith, and opened it where there was a little yellow paper mark, and gave her the hymn to read. She began, but her voice was quenched in tears. I took it from her, and quietly read it. I remember it now ; it began—

“To Thee, my God, I raised my voice,
And sought Thy gracious ear,
In the sad day when trouble rose
And fill'd my soul with fear.”

People have their favourite hymns—this was what Mrs. Hartlepool turned to in her great trial, probably for some early association; and from reading it frequently to her in such sad circumstances it found a place in my affection too. Miss Harbledown might have said there was not a word of the Saviour in it from beginning to end—but, as Matthew Henry says of the Book of Esther, “though the name of God is not once mentioned in it, the finger of God is traceable throughout.” So with this hymn. When I saw how it comforted Mrs. Hartlepool, I read it once or twice a day to her, till Urith did; and sometimes I read her other hymns, and then glided naturally, as it were, into the Psalms, Epistles, and Gospels. I could see it comforted Urith as well as her mother.

We all seemed now to share the consciousness of an unseen Presence in the room, attent unto our prayer, to our sorrow, to the unspoken wish that did but address itself to Him. How near God is! and how good!

Now she began to get just a little shade better.

Urith went to bed for a night—Helen and I sat up the first half of it, and then Marianne took Helen's place the other half. How sleepy she was, poor thing ; and how she struggled against it !

I now see how excellent the discipline was for the girls. And how it drew out the beauty of their characters ! As daylight kills the light of the stars, so prosperity conceals the graces that only reveal themselves in the time of adversity. The servants were very thoughtful and attentive, but the girls would do every thing they could for their mother with their own hands, and prepared every refreshment for her.

The terrible name of Death was never spoken by them, but the fear was continually upon them. When at length the kind physician said cautiously, he believed there was now a hope that, with care, Mrs. Hartlepool might recover, the revulsion was almost too great. Their eyes filled with tears—their lips quivered. Stepping into the dressing-room, I saw Urith on her knees, with her face buried in the bed-clothes, and softly withdrew without her seeing me. Mrs. Hartlepool's face bespoke such unutterable thankfulness and happiness ! She drew me down to her, softly saying, "Kiss me, Bessy !"

When Mr. Hartlepool returned, Urith went out

alone to meet him with the good news. I think it unmanned him : he blew his nose very loudly, said a few words in a husky voice, and strode up to his wife, taking two stairs at a time.

When the clock struck nine, she said, "My love, I should like prayers up here to-night. All the children and servants."

CHAPTER XVI.

FIRESIDE CHAT.

“Happiness and true philosophy
Are of the social, still, and smiling kind,
This is the life which those who fret in guilt,
And guilty cities, never know.”

WHEN dear Mrs. Hartlepool was recovering (though she was never quite well again) we used to have fireside talks, the subdued sweetness of which was worth all the former gaiety of heart. And there was a good deal of cheerfulness too, and still more of thankfulness.

I had much family news to hear—about the visitors who had flitted through the house during the summer—about Miss Rivers having had another flirtation ending in nothing—and about Miss Anne Keith’s grievous disappointment in the worthiness of her lover, whom, by the strong advice of her family, she was going to think of no more—if she could help it. “And I think she will get over it,” said Mrs. Hartlepool, “because he

proved to have no depth of character for her esteem to anchor on."

I listened with much interest to all that related to Miss Harbledown, who had proved herself very worthy of the regard of the family she had reluctantly quitted. Mr. Tom Hartlepool was at sea again, doing well, and occasionally sending home a capital letter.

There were two pieces of intelligence, one good, one bad, which surprised me very much.

The first was that Mr. John Brooke, of whom they had seen a good deal this summer, had fixed his affections on Helen, and, young as she was, had offered himself for her husband. There was absolutely nothing to object to in him, and every thing to like; but it seemed to have given all the family a great start, to think that Helen should be old enough to be thus taken away from them. They pleaded for more time to think about it, which was reluctantly acceded to; but there was every likelihood that the marriage would take place in the spring.

I spoke to Urith one day of the pleasant time we had had together in February, when Mr. Meggot paid us that unexpected visit. She became very grave.

“Oh, Bessy,” said she, “that was a very bad affair. It turned out that at that very time Phil was rusticated. He never showed his face at college again.”

I was dismayed, and remembered the reluctance he had shown to speak of his movements.

“You may imagine,” said Urith, “the grief it was to his mother, and how angry his father was, after the high expectations that had been formed of him. He would have nothing more to say to him, forbade him the house, which I think was wrong and imprudent, because it may drive him from bad to worse—besides, it is not Christian.”

“Where is Mr. Meggot now?”

“Nobody knows—none of us know. Living by his wits he must be, for his father will do nothing for him. I suppose he has found teaching of some sort—or perhaps he writes. He has disappeared from his friends.”

It seemed very sad ; but Urith evidently did not wish to pursue the subject. I think she was rather ashamed of having received him in the friendly way she did, though she could hardly have done otherwise, and “goodness thinks no ill where no ill seems.”

I could not help saying, “It is very bad to

neglect one's studies, and disappoint the reasonable expectations of one's parents; but I hardly think it warrants their casting him off."

"Oh, but he was worse than merely idle," said Urith. "He had got into quite a low set; had formed low connexions—besides being very much in debt. I do not know the particulars, but papa and mamma think him so wrong, that they wish never to see him again in their house; and you know they would not feel so strongly as that on a light occasion."

"No, indeed;" and, to quit a subject so unpleasant, I said presently, "Urith, how does authorship get on?"

"Oh dear," said she, laughing, "very badly indeed! Since my first grand success, I've had nothing but snubs and disappointments."

"Nay, but how has that been?"

"Nothing I have done since has met with acceptance from the publishers."

"Why, I thought a first success always disposed them to reckon on a second."

"Ay, but you see mine was a private venture they took no interest in, and the success of which, they were pleased to say, must have been owing to private friends; though you know that was hardly the case."

“Friends liked it all the better, no doubt, for being your doing,” said I, “and spoke warmly of it to others; but that would not have made those others promote its circulation if they had not liked it on its own account.”

“Surely not,” said Urith. “However, the mortifying fact is, that, thinking I had only to write and to sell, I wasted an immensity of energy and time and trouble and spirits; and, after all, for nothing.”

“Do not say for nothing—it must have done you good.”

After a pause she said, “I suppose it was very good practice—and discipline. The success made me work much harder than I should otherwise have done, and brought out what was in me; and the failure has shown there was not so much to bring out as I thought there was—taught me my market value—lowered my conceit.”

“I don’t think you were conceited,” said I. “It would not have been in human nature to be less so. You have shown your good-humour about it, at any rate.”

“Well, I see no use in being out of humour,” said she, laughing. “I am turning my attention now to other things. I used to be continually carrying on two chains of thought at once.”

I certainly thought she bore her disappointment very amiably.

At three weeks' end I was able to leave Mrs. Hartlepool without anxiety. Never shall I forget the affection and thankfulness of my friends. I was conscious of a deeper feeling for them than I had known before ; it seemed to me that I could go through fire and water for them, whereas I had only given zeal and watchfulness that had comparatively cost me nothing.

My mother was deeply interested in my details. She said, "They seemed never to have known what sorrow was ; but it could not go on so. Pain will find us out, if poverty does not ; and it is generally for the good of our souls."

I had not been at home more than three days, when Urith wrote to this effect :—

"Something unexpected has happened, dear Bessy. John Brooke has accepted an excellent appointment in India, and is to sail in three weeks. He takes out Helen with him. You may imagine our state : mamma bears up wonderfully, though I know how much she feels it. Helen has had one good cry ; since which she has seemed quite brave and happy. There is a great deal to be done in a very little time. Mamma begs you will come to

the wedding,"—and then followed disjointed details, and a string of commissions, for there were many minor ways of my helping them. It is so pleasant to feel one's self of use! Thenceforth there was much interchange of letters between us—how such a thing did not suit, another could not be had, another was wanted, such and such tradesmen must be hurried, such and such a workwoman was pre-engaged, &c. There were little allusions to home-scenes; but I felt them much too meagre. Helen seemed to have sprung into a woman all at once, and to have surprising forethought and self-possession. I knew there must be pangs and clingings that would never be told of, but outwardly all was joy and hope.

Helen was going to be near Basil, and this was a great comfort to them all, especially to Mrs. Hartlepool. All the girls wanted to give her pretty and useful presents; Edwy was going to invest his hoards in something very choice, and I had to answer a letter in round text on the subject, which involved some long walks to shops and bazaars, and resulted in complete success. Helen could not imagine how he could have thought of such a present, and declared it quite too beautiful for him to have gone to the expense of. She and

Urith came once or twice to London to do their own shopping ; but they did not like to leave Mrs. Hartlepool for more than a few hours, and I could do many things for them as well as they could.

I very much regretted I had seen so little of Mr. Brooke. They hardly knew him when I paid my second visit to Compton Friars, and his transient fancy for Miss Rivers made me take very little interest in him. I remembered a gentlemanlike exterior, keen eye, and full-toned, pleasant voice, and that was all. His being engaged to Helen made all the difference !

I had preparations of my own to make for so grand an event, that cost something more than time and trouble. My dear father was very generous to me on the occasion, though he said, laughingly, that three weddings would be as bad as a fire, and he hoped the next would be my own.

CHAPTER XVII.

A COUNTRY WEDDING.

“Behold, while she before the altar stands,
Hearing the holy priest that to her speaks,
And blesses her with his two happy hands,
How the red roses flush up in her cheeks.”

IT was a crisp, sunny day in November when I arrived at Compton Friars. As I drew near it I saw a couple of figures straying down the now leafless lime avenue. “The lovers!” thought I, and watched their slowly retreating figures with lively interest.

The house was full of near and distant relatives and chosen friends. It was a marvel how they were all stowed, and how Mrs. Hartlepool could bear the bustle of so many flitting about, the sound of so many voices, and so many to provide for. But she and Mr. Hartlepool had long been of one mind, that if a daughter of theirs married, it should be with all the adjuncts of an old-fashioned country wedding; therefore, setting her impaired health

aside as much as possible, she directed every thing (while Urith saw her orders executed), and was, as ever, the life and mainspring of the house, bravely hiding what it cost her. So Compton Friars overflowed with mirth and festivity; every room had its little group assisting in preparations, or contenting itself with admiring and amusing; relatives that had long been apart were renewing friendly relations; and even some who had been cool to one another thought this a very good opportunity of letting bygones be bygones. Every where there was hilarity on the surface, with an under-current of sadness.

The children came flying towards me from a group of young cousins; Miss Anne Keith gave me a friendly though rather grave smile of recognition. She was one of the chosen bridesmaids; and her father, a heavenly-looking old clergyman, had accompanied her from the North to officiate at his great-niece's wedding. Urith took me to her mother, who had retired to her room to recover herself a little. She let me sit beside her couch and talk to her for a few minutes, and I was surprised to see how the mind could conquer the body, and how personal emotions were held in check for the sake of others. A tear shone in her eye; but

she smiled and spoke cheerily in spite of it. Presently some one tapped at the door and said, "May an old man come in?"

"Oh, yes, uncle!" said Mrs. Hartlepool; and Mr. Keith's venerable silver head made its appearance.

"I'm used to sick-rooms, you know," he said, smiling and seating himself beside her, "and yours hardly looks like one, but I claim my privilege nevertheless; I'm so glad to have my dear Urith all to herself, and to talk of old times." So then I left them.

To my great pleasure I next met Mr. Tom Hartlepool, who was more sunburnt and amusing than ever. He shook hands most heartily with me, and asked if I did not think the affair very jolly. I said, "Yes, if it were not for the drawback."

"Oh, you mean the going to India. Well, *I've* been to India, and you see I've lived to come back again, and after no long absence. Oh, it's nothing when you're used to it."

"Helen is not going for a voyage only."

"No; but they'll be back in a few years. Brooke will make his fortune. Oh, it's nothing. To my aunt, however, I grant you, it's something; because she's very shaky; but I trust she will live many a


year yet. Still, it's a trial, a great trial to her. My notion is, not to let her think ; for otherwise she'll be sure to break down ; so join me, will you, in keeping the ball going ? I'm getting all the others to join."

In pursuance of this, he rattled from morning to night with one and another, helping Urith, as he said, to keep people amused. Helen came in from her walk with Mr. Brooke, looking very sweet, but tremulous ; she was hurrying to her room when she saw me, and said, "Oh, Bessy—dear Bessy!" and kissed me with great affection. Fresh presents had arrived for her, and these had to be opened and admired ; and while others were admiring them too, and volubly praising, she put her hand to her head, and gave me such a look !

In the evening, when people were dressing for dinner, I had a momentary glimpse of Mrs. Hartlepool in tears, with Urith comforting her.

I passed on, sincerely pitying her, to where Helen was sitting, her long, silky hair falling in tresses over her white dressing-gown, and saying, with a kind of luxurious melancholy, to her younger sisters,—

"Come, all of you who want a piece, only don't notch me terribly."



Marianne, flourishing her best mother-of-pearl scissors, said merrily,—

“‘ She takes the gift with reverence, and extends
The little engine on her fingers’ ends.’

—Now for the barber’s kiss, miss.”

I begged for a lock, too, and as we trifled with her beautiful hair, and put it this way and that, Mrs. Hartlepool came in, leaning on Urith, and looking quite tranquil; and then we soon went off, leaving them with Helen.


Later in the evening we sat round the fire in a great semicircle, Mrs. Hartlepool quite in the deep shadow of the old-fashioned chimney-piece, Helen beside her, with her hand locked in hers, Edwy feeding the fire from time to time with fir-cones and pieces of cocoa-nut shell, which crackled and made a pleasant scent; young and old talking and laughing by snatches—Mr. Keith entertaining us with sundry reminiscences of old times, even before Mrs. Hartlepool was born, and when he was courting his first wife. In the midst of it, Mr. Hartlepool came in, and led his wife quietly out of the room. They were followed by Helen and Mr. Brooke, Urith and Mr. Keith. There were law papers to sign in the next room, and we were left to our own devices

till supper-time, Mr. Tom Hartlepool doing his best to keep people amused, showing tricks, asking conundrums, and telling sea-stories. After supper there were many little things to arrange behind the scenes.

That night, when we were in our rooms, and supposed to be in our beds, there was suddenly a gush of music under Helen's window—a very pretty serenade, in which I distinguished her cousin Tom's mellow voice. I peeped behind my window-curtain, and saw the long, dark shadows of the singers on the frosty ground. Two or three thrums were given on the old guitar, and again we had "Piano, pianissimo," with very pleasing effect, followed by "Buona notte, amato bene," at the end of which two or three windows were thrown open and hands clapped. The singers glided away like ghosts; yet afterwards, when all seemed hushed, the silence was broken again, this time by a solitary voice, beneath the sisters' window, and I could catch the first verse of Clement Cleveland's song in the "Pirate"—

"Farewell, farewell! the voice you hear
Has left its last soft tone with you—
It next must join the seaward cheer,
And shout amid the shouting crew."

"Ah!" thought I, "that's for Marianne."



A disagreeable schoolboy must needs poke his head out of an attic window to cry, "That's enough, good man. Here's something for you!" followed by a splash of cold water! Such poor wit! And next morning, the same young hopeful said, "What a noise the cats were making last night!—it was almost like bad singing." (He was a nephew of Miss Poulter's, so what could you expect?)

Happy the bride the sun shines on! and it did shine on Helen. The wedding is in a golden haze now—joy and sorrow, smiles and tears, regrettings, rejoicings confusedly blended. The bridesmaids looked sweetly pretty in their white muslins and blue ribbons. I wanted to stay with Mrs. Hartlepool, but she would not let me. She said Miss Poulter was going to remain with her; but, to my surprise, I saw Miss Poulter in church. She had been disappointed of her bonnet, and could not appear without it; but, luckily for her, it arrived just after we had started, and kind Mrs. Hartlepool had sped her after us. So she took the short cut, across which the young gentlemen had raced to be in time to hand out the bridesmaids.

The sun streamed on Helen's head as she stood before the altar. I could see, by the vibrations of her veil, how tremulous she was; but Mr. Brooke's

steady, full-toned voice had its effect on her, and perhaps on us all. Old Mr. Keith's manner was most fatherly—quite patriarchal. There were flowers strewn, bells rung, cheers given, an old shoe thrown, all in right time and place. A pretty breakfast, of course ; a confused hum of voices, but no speeches. The bridal pair were to start early ; my place was with the other guests at table, therefore I missed the tender leave-taking, and we only saw them as they passed out, and saw that Helen could not look up. Her father put her into the carriage and wrung her hand—she leant forward for one more kiss.

Then I could not help running up to Mrs. Hartlepool. When Urith opened the door, it might have been thought there had been a funeral.

In consideration of her weak health and natural emotion, the wisest and most considerate went away soon. Miss Poulter remained last, and was affronted at Urith's saying her mamma required perfect quiet, with only her own family. In consequence of this she found fault with every thing. I did not like receiving her confidences, and to escape from her censures and complaints was the only thing that made me not sorry to leave Compton Friars.

Of course my mother was very much interested in my account of all that had passed. It had been a very bright, delightful scene, with just a dash of natural sorrow. When the wedding, the guests, the presents, the dresses, the breakfast, had all been described, she asked when they were all coming up for the winter.

I told her it was very doubtful whether they would come at all. Mrs. Hartlepool had been advised to winter in the country. If she came up, it would only be for the sake of her family.

“Then,” said my mother, “for her sake her family ought to remain where they are. If they do not, I shall have no patience with them. They ought to consider what is best for Mrs. Hartlepool.”

“They do, I assure you. Their greatest care is for her.”

I went to bed to dream of Compton Friars, little guessing how or when I should see it again. What a melancholy, terrible thing foresight would be!

CHAPTER XVIII.

COMING EVENTS.

“Encamp’d beside Life’s rushing stream
In Fancy’s misty light,
Gigantic shapes and shadows gleam
Portentous through the night.”

IT is neither a safe nor good habit to read in bed, but I can well understand how people with nerves that cannot be stilled in the night-watches resort to this means of quieting them. How vividly we think on our pillows! How a curtain seem drawn back that reveals what was cloudy and obscure by day! How trifling evils are magnified how fears and forebodings become unbearable. We are impatient for daylight to come and enable us to take such and such a step as our only means of safety. Daylight comes, and disperses all these night phantoms from the Beleaguered City, and we jog on unconcernedly in the old track.

“Down the broad vale of tears afar,
The spectral camp is fled;
Faith shineth as a morning star,
Our ghastly fears are dead.”

I had one of these unaccountable panics not very long after Helen's wedding. I had returned very contentedly to the common round, the daily task, hoping by my industry to make up for lost time. Perhaps the monotony of my work, and of my life, rather affected me, and prepared me for a restless night. It was horrible! the most sinister forebodings, the weakest, most unreasonable fears, the most absurd fancies chased sleep from my pillow. I could not even lie still, but tossed and turned about. Mainly my thoughts ran on Compton Friars, but also on ourselves. At last I struck a light, found a book, and quieted my nerves by reading.

With the return of daylight and common sense, I took myself to task for my late panic, and inquired into its source. Why had I imagined evils for the Hartlepoons? Probably because I had learnt from Urith that the idea of their wintering in London was finally given up; that had set me on considering the probability of Mrs. Hartlepool's renewed illness, perhaps to end in her death. Why had I fancied troubles were gathering about ourselves? Why, but that my mother and I could not but observe with pain that my dear father's memory was beginning to fail him, and that his

power of calculation was less to be relied on than hitherto? Mr. Tremlett had called our attention to this, doubtless with the best intentions, though my mother did not take it kindly of him.

“My friend Lyon is not the man he was, ma’am—he once had the cleverest head for figures I ever knew, but now I perceive it to be somewhat the worse for wear.”


“All of us are the worse for wear, Mr. Tremlett,” said my mother very shortly. “We don’t grow younger as we grow older.”

“Why, no,” said he, with a quiet little laugh, “that’s a self-evident proposition.”

“And it’s self-evident, I think,” said my mother, “that a man worked as hard and as late, without any intermission, as Peter is, cannot be always at his best. Did you never see the driver of a van being loaded with household furniture look carefully at the springs? They told him that the van would not hold above a certain weight. But Peter’s employers never look at *his* springs.”

“He is not exactly overworked—” began Mr. Tremlett.”

“Oh, pardon me,” interrupted my mother quickly. “He *is* overworked.”



“Well, the work has not increased on him,” rejoined Mr. Tremlett. “He and I do just the same that we have done for many years, and I don’t find myself the worse for it. But if you think Lyon wants a holiday, I’ll represent it to——”

“Pray take no such step unless he wishes it,” said my mother. “If he had a holiday offered him to-morrow, I much doubt whether he would accept it.”

“Nay, then, what *can* be done?”

“I don’t know that any thing can be done. He would say he could not be spared.”

“Very likely; and very true. Christmas is coming on, and Christmas is always a busy time. Well, then, I don’t see what *can* be done.—Miss Lyon, that’s a sweet thing you are doing.”

And he came and looked at my drawing, without understanding it in the least.

“Is *this* your doing, too?” said he, looking at a painting on the wall. “I don’t remember to have seen it before.”

“Why, Mr. Tremlett, it has hung there these three years!” said my mother tartly. “Where is *your* memory, sir?”

“Ha, ha!—very good,” said he, laughing. “You

had me there, upon my word. I'm sure I beg Miss Lyon's pardon. No offence, I hope?"

"None at all, sir."

Returning home next day from a walk, I was caught in a heavy rain, and was glad to take shelter under an archway. Other persons were doing the same; one of them, a gentleman, was in the act of letting down a wet umbrella, and, looking full at me, "Miss Lyon!" cried he.

"Mr. Meggot!" I involuntarily ejaculated.

"What a pleasant rencontre!" he exclaimed, holding out his hand so that I could not well avoid taking it, and then shaking mine very heartily. "I am quite glad to see you. How well you are looking! You *are* very well?"

"Very well, I thank you," I replied with constraint.

"How long is it since I had the pleasure of seeing you? I—"

And he seemed launching into a long talk, when I cut it short by saying, "I believe the rain is abating now. Good morning," and picked my way out into the rain.

"Miss Lyon, it's raining harder than ever! Pray don't be so imprudent!—Nay, if you will, you must allow me to hold my umbrella over you."

“Pray do not, Mr. Meggot!” said I, in strong remonstrance.

“Indeed I must!” And I literally could not prevent him, unless by taking to my heels and running away; and even then he might easily have run with me.

“You are very determined not to be beholden to me,” said he, laughing, “for a very small courtesy. Indeed I should be unworthy of the name of man to withhold it.”

I said nothing, for I really knew not what to say, and I did not want to give him the smallest encouragement. Meantime it was, as he said, raining cats and dogs, running in rivulets off his umbrella and hat.

In a little while I said, “I am home now—thank you very much.”

“Let me wait till the door is opened.” And it *was* opened the next moment, by my mother, exclaiming, “My dear Bessy, how wet you are!”—and then she stopped short, and looked at my companion in surprise.

“Mr. Meggot, mother.”

She declared to me afterwards that she did not catch his name, but felt sure he was one of “the Hartlepool set.” I inclined to think she took him

for that hero she expected to drop from the skies for me !

“ Pray step in, sir,” said she very cordially to Mr. Meggot, who was making as though about to retreat ; but who, at the very first word, raised his hat, bowed very gracefully, and accepted the invitation.

“ Dear me,” said she, “ you’re as wet as ever you can be. And you too, Bessy : run up this moment, child, and change every thing : you have not a dry thread about you.”

I did as she desired, provoked and worried out of measure ; and as I passed my glass I saw how red and cross I looked. I began to pull off my wet things as fast as I could—it was impossible to make a fresh toilette in a hurry. Meanwhile I could hear, in the parlour below, the almost exaggerated cordiality of the two who seemed so bent on rapid acquaintance. I hated to join them, and yet did not like to leave them together, to flounder into all sorts of difficulties. What with the run, the rain, and the worry, my head ached intolerably, but it was no use minding that. I made myself tidy as soon as I could, and though my heart still beat fast and my head throbbed, I went down, looking tolerably composed. There I found them in high sociability.

“Only think, Bessy! Mr. ——” (she could not recall his name) “knows all about the Okehampton people, and remembers the Sedleys very well.”

I knew that if Mr. Meggot could talk to my mother of the Sedleys, the key to her good graces was secured. I made some monosyllabic answer and took out my work. They went on very fluently about the Sedleys and collateral subjects; and, when a pause ensued, Mr. Meggot said he hoped I had not forsaken my pencil.

“On the contrary,” said my mother, “she draws and paints as if she depended on it, and more than is good for her health. I often scold her for it.”

“That painting over the chiffonière is by one of the ancient masters, I suppose?” (How could he have the face to say so!)

“No, that is by Bessy,” said my mother, much pleased; “but more than one person has said it would not disgrace a good artist.”

“I am not surprised. It is certainly extremely well done. I dare say she has done many charming things besides.”

“A good many,” said my mother. “Especially ‘Haymakers in a Thunderstorm’”—giving me a look which I did not seem to observe.

“By-the-bye, Miss Lyon, talking of haymakers and thunder-showers, have you been in the country this summer?”

“No.”

“Bessy!”

“Only for a short time—twice, in the autumn.”

“Oh!” He walked to the window. “You have not quite such a look-out here as there is at Compton Friars.”

“No, indeed,” I said.

“That large building opposite takes away a good deal of your daylight.”

“That’s the brewery,” interposed my mother, “by which my husband earns his bread and cheese.”

“Ha! He is, then, of the firm of——”

“No, sir, only a clerk in the firm of Messrs. Maltby and Simmons.”

“I have heard much of their beer; is it as good as report says?”

“Well, we think it good.”

“Seeing is believing, and tasting is testing,” said Mr. Meggot. “Perhaps you will let me judge for myself, for I seem to have taken a little chill——”

“With pleasure,” said my mother, with alacrity. “I shall indeed be sorry if you have caught cold through Bessy!”

“Oh, don't mention it.”

She hurried away to draw the table-beer herself, knowing that our little maid could not just then put in an appearance. Directly she was gone Mr. Meggot threw himself into my father's arm-chair, and, in quite a changed manner, said to me,—

“Miss Lyon, for goodness' sake, what do the Hartlepoons say of me?”

I was taken quite aback, and could only repeat, “Say of you?”

“Ay,” said he, “what do they say? What do they think? You know how I have dropped out of their set and lost sight of them. Tell me, I conjure you, what they say. Don't mind speaking out.”

I said, with painful hesitation, “I really don't know what they say—I never heard Mr. or Mrs. Hartlepool speak of you.”

“Oh, don't put me off in that way—it's cruel of you. Don't refuse to tell me. It is of the utmost importance I should know.”

I felt this might be the case and was in distress for him. “Oh, Mr. Meggot,” I said, “*indeed* there is nothing I can tell you——”

“There *must* be,” he persisted. “What did Urith say?”

“She said you had disappointed the wishes of your friends.”

“Truly I have! But that was not all?”

“I really cannot recall her words. Besides, I have no right to repeat them.”

“What did she know?”

“I don’t know that she knew any thing beyond your disappointing the expectations of your friends and displeasing your family.”

“Those are fine generalities. She must have heard more than that?”

“I cannot say——”

“Did she blame me or pity me?”

“Both, I think.”

He gave an impatient sigh that was almost a groan. At that instant my mother returned with a foaming jug and tumbler on a waiter, and he sprang up to relieve her of it.

“Thanks! thanks!” said he hastily. “Now I shall form my own opinion of this celebrated brewst. I drink your very good health in it, Mrs. Lyon. And yours also, Miss Lyon”—filling the glass and drinking it off with avidity.

“Ha! excellent! It seems to me quite to deserve its reputation, Mrs. Lyon; but a second experiment, made more deliberately, will enable me better to decide.”

He filled the glass again, and drank that too.

“Capital stuff!” said he, setting down the tumbler. “I have not tasted better beer since I was at Oxford. There may be a thought too much hop in it”—filling the glass again, slowly and abstractedly, and holding it up to the light—“but yet, I hardly know.—What says Mr. Lyon?”

“He finds no fault with it, sir.”

“Then no more will I. Depend on it he’s right. Well, my dear Mrs. Lyon, it has taken the chill completely out of me. I am all in a glow. I can face the weather now, ‘spit fire, spout rain,’ nor tax the elements with unkindness—and if I take this glass, which it was thoughtless and wasteful to pour out, it will be medicinally. Prevention is better than cure.”

He shook hands with both of us as if we were friends of long standing, thanked my mother with effusion, and, patting himself on the chest after buttoning up his great-coat, went off, saying, “Broadcloth without and a warm heart within.”

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. SPIGGOT.

“Grievous accounts
The weekly post to the vex’d parent brought.”

“THAT young man *did* like his beer,” said my mother, looking at me rather strangely. “*Who* do you say he is?”

“Oh, mother! can you really not have known all this time? Mr. Meggot!”

“Never heard his name rightly till this moment, if you’ll believe me,” said my mother emphatically; “but of course I made him out to be of the Hartlepool set, and therefore knew all was right.”

“But, dear mother, all is *not* right, and you took him too much upon trust.”

“You don’t say so!” cried my mother, looking alarmed.

“Don’t you remember the trick he and Mr. Tom Hartlepool played me the first time I went to Compton Friars?”

“‘Tom and Phil,’ as you called them? But those were boys.”

“But they are young men now, and this is Phil.”

“Well, then, he has shot up into a fine young man, and a fine gentleman; that boyish joke was never worth bearing malice about all this time.”

“Dear me, no,” said I. “I never bore them any malice about it. We were always very good friends up to the last time I met Mr. Meggot, which was last spring, when I was at Compton Friars with Urith and Edwy.”

“Ah, I remember now—something about your unexpected meeting and his coming to dine with you, and Urith’s refusing to give him tea; but, do you know, I think that was the north side of friendly to her cousin.”

“Well, I almost thought so too at the time,” said I; “but only think, mother, how badly things turned out! It appeared, afterwards, that he was actually rusticated at that very time—expelled from college, you know.”

“Ah, well, that was a very bad job, and he may rue it all his life. But, after all, my dear, these are things women need not take up. Young men will

be young men ; and old men are apt to be very hard upon them, forgetting they were once young too. A young lad makes a mistake in his Latin exercise, maybe—writes hack for hock, or something like that—and then the Dons are down upon him, and because he's too old for a caning or a dark closet, they ruralize him, or whatever you call it—turn the poor fellow adrift with a bad name to stick by him for life—a much more cruel thing than a sound caning.”

“ But I fear, mother, it was for something much worse than putting hack for hock,” said I.

“ Tush ! do you *know* it was ?”

“ No ; but Urith thought——”

“ Don't tell me what Urith thought, Bessy—I've no patience ! Here's a fine, handsome, genteel young man, a born gentleman, who has been sent too young to college and made his own master, been exposed to all sorts of temptations that you and I know nothing about ; and because he spent a little too much money, maybe, was taken in by the tradespeople, did not keep his accounts quite straight, and asked his father for assistance ;—or because he was a little backward with his tasks and not ready enough with answers to puzzling questions—is turned adrift and his prospects

ruined ; and as if that were not bad enough, Urith comes in with *she believes*—*she suspects*—I call it cruel !—shameful !”

I did not know what to say ; for besides that the vehemence of my mother’s partisanship took me by surprise, I found it impossible not to be somewhat touched by Mr. Meggot’s passionate entreaties to know what the Hartlepoons said of him. What Urith said and thought of him seemed to be the special point ; and could it be, then, that in spite of his manner to her being just the same that it was to every body else, there was affection for her underlying it, and a deep concern for her regard ? I had read in tales of young women making sad mistakes in the characters of young men, who, after being suspected and accused of all manner of delinquencies, turned out in the end to have been perfectly blameless. How did I know that Mr. Meggot might not be able to clear himself entirely, if he but knew the allegations against him ? Could he, at all events, be wondered at, or blamed for wishing to do so ? for chafing under the sense of lost esteem in those whose opinion he much valued ? For the moment a strong desire possessed me to reinstate him, if I could, in the good graces of the Hartlepoons ; and while I thus

turned things in my mind I remained quite silent.

My mother returned to the charge by saying, "I have often observed that your very good people are the most uncharitable of censors. What Mr. Spiggot's parents——"

I smiled and corrected her. "Meggot."

"I said Meggot. What his parents may be, I know no more than you do. Hard, unnatural people, ten to one; but I do know what the Hartle-pools are—people without a fault, or assuming to be such; and exacting the same faultlessness in all their acquaintance; which is quite unreasonable."

"Oh, no! indeed they do not."

"I say they do: here is a case in point. Let them hear what the young man has to say for himself; let them tell him to his face what he is suspected of; and if the charges can't be disproved, *then* will be time enough to cast him off. Anyhow, you and I have nothing to do with it; he owes us no account, we make no accusation; he pays you a civility, perhaps to his own cost; I express my obligation to him; he sits down with us, just as we are, and enters into pleasant chat about old friends and distant scenes—and if he likes to do so

again, let him and welcome! He won't hurt you or me, Bessy!"

A knock at the door made my mother start. Taking up the tray with the empty glass and jug, she said, in a lower tone,—

“He did like his beer, that's certain.”

Yes, and so he had liked Mrs. Bennet's. I did not very well know what to think of it. I had a vague idea that many young men at college drank a great deal more than was good for them; as much for good fellowship as any thing else—till, indeed, the habit grew on them, and too often became a vice. It might have done so with Mr. Meggot, but it did not therefore follow that he had been rusticated for it. That might have been on a separate count; neglect of his tasks, as my mother phrased it.

She had left the room, and I remained wistfully ruminating. His manner to us both had been so different from what it formerly was to me, that I was involuntarily influenced by it. Why should he trouble himself to try to please *us*? Why, but that, knowing my friendly footing with the Hartlepoons, he desired to secure my mediation? That assumption explained it; made his persistence in coming home with me quite simple. I pitied him, and felt

desirous to befriend him if I could. Even if he were not faultless—and, in fact, I could not suppose him to be so—yet charity covers a multitude of sins, and contrition impels to forgiveness.

No sooner had I settled this than I felt I must write to Urith. I did so, and briefly told her that during a heavy shower that morning I had had a singular rencontre. I had met Mr. Meggot, who had insisted on sheltering me with his umbrella all the way home, though quite contrary to my wish ; my mother had asked him in and offered him some slight refreshment, and while she was procuring it he had inquired of me, in the most earnest manner, for news of his uncle's family, and expressed deep regret for having lost their good opinion. I added, that whatever his faulty conduct had been, he seemed sincerely sorry for it ; and that it appeared, to one so little acquainted with the subject as myself, that it might be a wise as well as kind thing to give him the opportunity of regaining the goodwill of his friends.

My mother came in while I was writing. She said, "Are you writing to Miss Hartlepool?"

I said "Yes," and she rejoined,—

"Ah, well ! I hope you will speak a good word for the young man if you can."

I said, "I am doing so," and she left the room.

Till my letter was posted I felt quite sure that it was a good one, and likely to have beneficial results. As soon as it was in the letter-box my opinion of it changed; a blank misgiving oppressed me. I feared I had been officious, Quixotic, and had better have desisted. Should I then have concealed my meeting with Mr. Meggot? *That* did not seem very right. I could not have borne to conceal from such dear friends any thing that concerned them. Did it concern them? Why, yes, I thought it did. It might affect the future of one who had, till of late, been on the most familiar footing with them. It gave them the opportunity of showing him justice or mercy, whether they used it or not. Still I had a terrible presentiment of coming mischief, and was ready to wish, with Bailie Nicol Jarvie, that my boots had been full of boiling water rather than that I had left home that day.

Twenty-four hours passed in trouble that my mother knew little of, and yet even she was not quite easy. At the end of that time, the earliest post by which I could receive a reply to my impulsive letter, brought me one not from Urith, but Mrs. Hartlepool.

I quite sickened when I saw her hand, and could

not immediately break the seal. The letter has long been burnt, but I can never forget its substance, nor the pain it gave me. It was to this effect:—

“ Compton Friars, Nov. 29.

“I write to you, my dear Bessy, instead of allowing Urith to do so, because your letter to her is on a subject that she can have nothing to do with. I am very sorry indeed that you ever wrote it: knowing all you knew, it did not show your usual discretion. Mr. Meggot was from childhood treated by us as one of the family, and he abused his trust. Urith does not know all the particulars, nor is there need to go into them with you, because what you already knew should have been sufficient. Mr. Hartlepool's opinion and mine should have been enough for you as well as for Urith. Philip has put himself beyond the power of his relations and best friends to help or respect him. If you write any more to Urith the subject must not be alluded to. I think the best way will be for you not to write to her at all for the present. The more I think of it, the more I am surprised that you allowed him to walk home with you. A young woman would be at the mercy of every rude young man, if she contented herself with saying ‘she

could not help it.' And, taking it for granted, from your habitual frankness, that Mrs. Lyon was acquainted with the story, as far as you knew it, I am still more surprised that a woman of her sense should have welcomed him in and offered him refreshment. I hope you will see no more of him.

“Your sincere friend,

“URITH HARTLEPOOL.”

My mother, who had heard the postman's knock, came hurrying in.

“What does Miss Hartlepool say, Bessy?”

“*Mrs.* Hartlepool has written, mother.” I held out the letter.

“*Mrs.* Hartlepool? oh, then I fear it's a bad job,” said she, sitting down to read it with a very serious face. She reddened deeply as she ran through it.

“This is abominable of *Mrs.* Hartlepool! What business has she to write to you in this way, Bessy? She rates you as if you were a maid-of-all-work. If she has her feelings, I have mine; if she is a mother, I am a mother. Surprised at me, indeed? I'm surprised at her, I can tell her. I suppose I have a right to invite who I like into my own house? It may be a small one, but I am

its mistress, and may choose my own company. A woman of my sense? Yes, I have some sense ; quite enough for the guidance of my own daughter. As long as I guide you, you'll never go wrong. *I* shall answer this letter, Bessy. If Mrs. Hartlepool answers *her* daughter's letter, I shall answer *my* daughter's letter."

CHAPTER XX.

AN IMBROGLIO.

“That you have wrong’d me doth appear in this—”

I BURST into tears. “Oh, mother! mother!” said I, “pray do not. You will be sure to make mischief——”

“Why, Bessy! I never knew such a thing in my life,” said she very angrily. “When did you say such an undutiful thing to me before?”

“I never did, and, therefore, pray believe I don’t mean to be undutiful now; only you try me too much. Pray, pray, mother, don’t write to Mrs. Hartlepool——”

“But I certainly shall. It won’t be the first time. Why, she and I corresponded as friends before you were born! What are you thinking of?”

I cried silently.

“You may trust your own mother, I think,” she pursued. “Who taught you to know right from

wrong, if I did not? How came you to know the Hartlepoons but through me? Why did Mrs. Hartlepool first invite you to Compton Friars, but for my sake? You are a little beside yourself, I think."

"Then, if you do write, I must write too," said I.

"I desire you will not."

And now that there was this antagonism between us I had no chance of seeing what she wrote to Mrs. Hartlepool. Usually my mother was a long time over a letter, but this one was written quickly, too quickly (as, alas, mine had been), under the influence of feeling, and, I fear, of temper.

It never had an answer.

When my father came home in the evening he could not make out what ailed us. On that unlucky Tuesday, when he returned, my mother had taken the matter into her own hands, and said to him, quite cheerfully,—

"We had the surprise of a visitor to-day, Peter. One of Mr. Hartlepool's relations, a Mr. Spiggot—"

("Meggot.")

"Meggot—met Bessy in that heavy rain and

held his umbrella over her all the way home. They were both as wet as could be, so I made him come in and made up the fire, and he seemed to have taken a chill, so I made him have a glass of our table-ale——”

“ Three glasses, mother——”

“ Not all at once, Bessy ; I gave him *a* glass, and he found it so good that, as there was more in the jug, he finished it.”

“ Ha, ha, ha ! I'm glad, my dear, you were so hospitable. I hope you offered him some bread and cheese with it ?”

“ It was very stupid of me not to do so, Peter, but I did not know so fine a gentleman would condescend to it, and, besides, I knew our cheese was almost all gone and not very good. We had a long talk about Okehampton ; he knows the Sedleys quite well.”

“ I'll answer for it, my dear, if he set you off upon them you did not know when to stop.”

I did not say a word, and the subject soon dropped. Now, however, there was no escaping it. My father said,—

“ My dear, you seem a little flat this evening. I suppose it's the weather.”

She said, “ Oh, no, Peter, it's not the weather.

I wish it was. Bessy and I have had a little something unpleasant."

"Ay, ay? What was that?"

"Mrs. Hartlepool wrote a most disagreeable letter, quite finding fault with Bessy for letting Mr. Meggot walk home with her the other day, and forbidding her to write again for the present."

"Wh—ew!" my father gave a long, soft whistle. "That seems rather strong."

"Strong and wrong," said my mother. "I was not going to let Bessy be put down so, you may be sure; I had too much spirit for that; so I told her a bit of my mind."

"And thereby endangered the loss of my dearest friend," said I, again crying.

"Bessy, Bessy!" said my father, in remonstrance, "don't cry about it, my dear—your mother meant all for the best, and very likely it will turn out to have been so——"

"Oh, no, father——"

"But I say, oh, yes, though I hope your mother was not too peppery."

"Just as if I were in the habit of being peppery!" said my mother.

"You are not, my dear, in the habit of being so, though now and then you do burst out."

“I was not going to see Bessy set down in that way.”

“But I don’t understand the rights of it. Where was the offence? Was she jealous of this young man’s civilities?”

“Very likely.”

“Oh, no, father,” said I, “he has forfeited her good opinion, and she does not like my seeming to take part with him.”

“Well, there’s nothing very surprising in that. My dear, I hope you may not have been too hasty with Mrs. Hartlepool. She has been a kind friend to Bessy.”

“Peter, how you do change about! Of course she has been a kind friend; and Bessy was a kind friend to her when she was at death’s door, sitting up with her all night reading hymns and the Bible. Those were kindnesses that money can’t buy.”

“Certainly, but—Has this young man ever been a lover of Miss Hartlepool’s?”

“No. At least, for any thing I know, he may have been. Was he, Bessy?”

“Not that I know of. I know nothing about it.”

“Is he married or single?”

“Single,” said my mother quickly.

"Mother, how *can* you tell? If you know, I do not."

"Well, I'm sure I thought he was."

"Come, this begins to be curious," said my father. "Do you mean that the Hartlepoons don't know?"

"I don't think Urith knows, but Mr. and Mrs. Hartlepool may. When Mrs. Hartlepool was so ill, Urith told me that they had been sadly disappointed in Mr. Meggot—he had defeated all his friends' good hopes of him—had formed low connexions, got into disgrace, and been expelled from college."

"This looks very serious," said my father gravely. "My dear, I wonder you should welcome to your house a young man of this sort, with no character at all. It does not look like your usual prudence."

"I never heard Bessy say so much against him before," said my mother.

"Oh, yes, mother——"

"I never did!"

"I told you all about it when I returned from Compton Friars, after Mrs. Hartlepool's illness."

"I don't believe you told me half. If you did, I forgot it. Things like that make no impression about people one does not know or care for."

“Well, the case seems to be this,” said my father : “here’s a gentleman coming to visit us whom we don’t know to be married or single. Before he is made welcome any farther that question had better be ascertained.”

“Who’s to put it ?” said my mother.

“Not Bessy, of course. And I’m never at home, except to dinner ; so it must be you.”

“Well, I can’t say I relish it.”

“No, I dare say not ; but, my dear, your own sense must show that it is needful. We have no call to know him, except on our own terms. What is he to us ? and what business has he here ?”

“Well, I begin to hope he won’t call again.”

“So do I, I’m sure,” said I.

“And now let us have a game at backgammon,” said my father. “Oh, here’s Tremlett. Welcome, Tremlett ! I’m very glad to see you.”

I certainly was glad too.

As I could not, of course, tell that Mrs. Hartlepool would not answer my mother’s letter, I was painfully nervous whenever I heard the postman’s knock gradually approaching us. At first I hardly knew whether it gave me relief or a pang to see him pass us by. But soon it became unmistakably the latter. I knew I was given up ! Oh, what tears it

cost me! What wakeful nights! All from a mistaken idea of doing good, a piece of officiousness. I knew my poor mother was uneasy too, by her being cross. After a time this passed off; then I ventured to say, as the postman went by, "No letter for us; I do wish, dear mother, you would tell me what you wrote to Mrs. Hartlepool."

"I could not if I tried," said my mother. "Your father asked me the same thing, and I could not tell him. I said what I thought proper at the time. When people feel strongly they can't charge their memories with what they say or write."

Then what a pity people should speak or write till they cool! Better write a letter ten times over than send an ill-advised one. I almost think it would be better not to write letters at all. There are plenty of illiterate people who cannot. Do they get on better than the scribes? Ah, no; there are other ways of being imprudent.

One day I was listlessly drawing when our little maid opened the door and stolidly announced,—

"Mr. Maggot."

I started, and spilt some water on my painting. "Mr. Meggot," I said hastily, "I am sorry for it, but—I am engaged, and I cannot see any one this morning."

Without paying the least attention to this speech, he said, in a low, eager voice,—

“Excuse me, but—have you heard from any of the Hartlepoons?”

“Yes,” said I, becoming excited, “and you have lost me the dearest friends I had in the world.”

“Oh! how can I have done that? My dear Miss Lyon——”

“I would rather say nothing about it,” replied I, refusing to recognize his look of distress; “and if you will be so good as to excuse me——”

I was retreating as I spoke, when my mother came in, with a smile that I saw was called up with a purpose.

“Good morning, Mr. Meggot,” said she, “I hope you are very well, sir; and how is Mrs. Meggot?”

Instantly his look, tone, and mien changed, as if at a touch from Ithuriel’s spear.

“Oh!—pretty well, I thank you—that is, she’s not very well this morning,” said he in confusion, and taking refuge in a silly laugh. “So you knew I was married?”

“Well, I guessed it,” said my mother, sitting down and looking full at him, “though I believe you didn’t mention it.”

“Well, no—we were not on terms, you know—I

felt such a stranger—with you, I mean, of course. I have long had the pleasure of Miss Lyon's acquaintance, and I didn't know that she required telling——”

“It was no affair of mine,” said I, “but you did not tell Mrs. Hartlepool.”

“Why, no, because——You see, Mrs. Lyon, I chose my wife from the ranks; and I didn't know how my friends would take it; but I'm sure your true woman's heart will plead for a choice made to please myself rather than the mercenary wishes of my friends; and—*you*, Miss Lyon, I need not remind of those touching lines of the poet—apropos of Palemon and Lavinia—in which the cultivated landed proprietor says something of this sort to the beautiful gleaner,—

‘In what sequester'd desert hast thou drawn
The kindest aspect of indulgent heaven?
Into such beauty spread, and—and'——

ha—hum—ha—the context has escaped me.”

“Do you mean to say, Mr. Meggot,” cried my mother, “that you actually took a wife from the harvest-field?”

“No, no, no—ha, ha! how amusing!—not quite so bad as that—it was only a *façon de parler*. I'll bring her to you some day, to judge of for your-

self. An innocent, simple little thing, Mrs. Lyon—quite a child of nature.”

“None the worse for that, maybe, Mr. Meggot. She may have the making of a real good wife in her, if you don’t expect too much.”

“No, no, I don’t expect too much.”

“That’s right, sir. You must bear with her, and make allowance for any little deficiencies in things that, after all, don’t go far towards making people happy.”

“My dear Mrs. Lyon, you speak like a sage and a saint.”

“And you speak like an honest, well-meaning young gentleman now,” said my mother with warmth; “and I esteem you all the more, now there’s no concealment between us. Take my advice, and be equally candid with your friends; and they’ll soon take you into favour again.”

“Oh, my friends!—you don’t know them!” cried he, throwing out his arms and starting up. “They’re the most impracticable set. Well, good morning—I’m interrupting Miss Lyon”—and, shaking hands with us both, he went off.

CHAPTER XXI.

“SAVE ME FROM MY FRIENDS.”

“His genius and his moral fame
Were thus impair'd, and he became
The slave of low desires.”

I LAUGHED and said, “You know the way to get rid of him now, mother.”

“But I did not want to get rid of him,” she answered. “I wanted to know who his wife was, and where they live, and what he is doing.”

“Questions he would not much like to answer.”

“I don't know why he should object. I might be a useful friend to the poor young thing. I dare say she is some pretty, penniless girl, the daughter of some Oxford tailor, or whip-maker, or pastry-cook, who has learnt nothing but how to set herself out, and has had her foolish little head turned by empty compliments. Girls of that stamp seldom know one mortal thing of use, and are much to be pitied, poor creatures, especially if motherless. Instead of making sixpence go as far as a shilling,

they are likelier to make a shilling go no farther than sixpence."

When my father came home she said triumphantly, "I've solved the mystery, Peter! Mr. Sp—Meggot *is* married."

"Oh, well, I'm glad it's settled," said he. "Where there's mystery there's too often mischief. Where do they live?"

"I forgot to ask—I mean, I had not time. He did not stay long."

"What is he doing?"

"He did not say."

"Not much good, I'm afraid. Young men that go a morning-visiting and idling at ladies' work-tables have seldom much work in them."

It really seemed, for some little time, that my mother had given Mr. Meggot such a shock that he was not bold enough to intrude on us again. And why should he? He knew now that there was no hope of gaining news of the Hartlepoons from me, for that our intercourse had ceased; he had been forced to acknowledge his marriage, therefore he could no longer appear among us under a false character. There was nothing to gain of us,—yes, there was, though of so humble a kind that I should not have thought it worth seeking.

One day towards Christmas we were just sitting

down to dinner, when Mr. Meggot suddenly appeared. He started back when he saw our table spread, but my mother hospitably said,—

“Don’t run away, Mr. Meggot—come and do as we do—take your luncheon at our dinner, if the stew is not too strong for you. This is my husband, sir.”

“Mr. Lyon, I’m most happy to make your acquaintance—I fear I intrude——”

“Not at all, Mr. Meggot—I’m happy to see you. Pray sit down with us, if we are not robbing your good lady of your company.”

“Oh, my wife does not dine at home to-day,” said he carelessly, “so I’m quite at your service”—and seemed looking about for a dinner-napkin. He looked wretchedly ill : he was naturally spare, but had become quite gaunt and sallow.

“You must tell me, Mr. Meggot, if I don’t help you to your mind,” said my mother, who only pretended to help herself that she might supply him more abundantly.

“Your ragoût is first-rate,” said he heartily. “You must have a very good cook.”

“Ay, I have a very good cook,” said my father, laughing expressively.

“And this ale—a pretty deal better than Sir

Thomas More got at Cambridge!—oh, by-the-bye, I recollect tasting it once before. It is excellent."

It was quite painful to me to see how hungry he was, while doing his best not to show it. He seemed a famishing man. "Poor Mr. Meggot," thought I; "I wonder if your wife has had any dinner at all."

"Do you live near here, sir?" said my mother.

"Quite the other end of the town," said he. "My pupils lie in that direction."

"What street?"

"Barset Street."

None of us had heard of such a street; but that did not preclude its existence.

"I'm glad to hear you have pupils, Mr. Meggot."

"It's holiday-time now, though, so I have them no longer. I have one, however, worth all the rest—a self-educated man, determined to push his way upward. Extraordinary clever fellow—he really interests me—but we study at night. He is all day at his trade. He can't pay me very well, poor fellow, but I must teach him for love if I did not for money."

"That is very kind, Mr. Meggot!"

"Ah, I've learnt the value of kindness. I don't get much of it now."

My father silently filled his tumbler—my mother filled his plate.

“You are giving me too much,” said he, staying her hand; but she emptied the spoon for all that.

“Of my little a little I’ll give,” said she gaily. “It does me good to see you enjoy it so.”

“Oh, I do indeed. I wish my wife could make a ragoût like this.”

“Let me teach her, Mr. Meggot! It would be a pleasure to me. There’s many a thing an old housewife can teach a young one.”

“Unfortunately my wife does not like being taught. She thinks she does not want teaching. But she’s a darling creature.”

“No one should be above being taught,” said my mother. “I’ve told Bessy so a hundred times.”

“Well, I must be on the move,” said my father. “Are you going my way, Mr. Meggot?”

“Which *is* your way, sir?”

“Which is yours?”

“Westward.”

“Then I’m your man.” So the oddly-matched pair went off. Had it not been for his companion, my father’s way would merely have been across the street. He had a quiet laugh about it in the evening.

"My companion did not trouble me long," said he. "He made an excuse at the street corner, and stalked off on those thin shanks of his double-quick time."

"How came you to propose going with him, Peter?"

"To get him out of the house, instead of remaining on your hands."

"I think he was fearfully hungry when he came in."

"My dear, I believe he was a starving man. Poor fellow!"

We saw no more of him for a while; we had enough to do with troubles of our own. One forenoon Mr. Tremlett came in, looking quite white. He said,—

"Miss Lyon, don't be alarmed. I wish to speak to Mrs. Lyon."

"Oh! what has gone wrong?" exclaimed I in terror. "My father?"

"What is it, Mr. Tremlett?" cried my mother, hurrying in.

"You take me by storm," said he. "I can't get out a word. Mr. Lyon has gone wrong, as you say——"

"How? Oh, *do* speak, Mr. Tremlett! Think of our feelings."

“I do think of your feelings. He's done nothing wrong, I'm quite sure—only it has the appearance of it. His head, you know, has been getting bad for some time—we have been hard at work at the books lately; he's got his accounts into a shocking mess—can't find the balance; and it does seem—mind, I only say seem—that there is a serious deficiency.”

My mother dropped into a chair, quite unable to speak.

“But it is only because his brain has been over-taxed,” cried I vehemently. “I know it is! He has worn it out in their service. Mother, never mind! I will run over and tell them how it is——”

“Miss Lyon, indeed you must not,” said Mr. Tremlett, very kindly, and staying me most respectfully with his hand on my arm. “It would be quite out of rule and unbusiness-like, would do more harm than good. I only slipped across to give you an inkling how things were going, that you might not be too much taken aback when he came home and told you himself.”

“How *are* things going?”

“Well, very unpleasantly. The partners are hauling him over the coals.”

We both began to cry bitterly.

"Here he comes," said Mr. Tremlett, with an air of relief, as a passing figure darkened the window. "Here comes my old friend. Well, Lyon?" hurrying to open the door to him and admitting him with demonstrative welcome.

My father might almost have been called, like Moses, "the meekest man of all the earth." He was of most sweet disposition; but when he now came in he had a hard, dogged look, quite foreign to him. His teeth were set, his brows knit, his eyes small and lurid, his arms crossed on his chest with a determination that had something of dignity. He planted himself before the fire, looking straight forward at the opposite wall, while my mother, with a troubled face, pushed his chair towards him, and faintly said, "My dear——"

He gave her a look that warned her to desist. I turned deadly sick and cold, and could not help trembling.

"Well, Lyon? well, old friend?" began Mr. Tremlett, with feigned lightness, "they've let you off now; how did it end?"

"Discharged! discharged! A thirty years' servant," said my father, in a low, unnatural voice. "A thirty years' servant, but not a slave; grown grey in their office, with a brain exhausted

by unremitting toil in their interests; suspected, accused, upbraided, chidden like a boy; discharged! discharged!"

"Come up-stairs with me, my dear, and lie down a little," said my mother soothingly, and trying to take his hand. He gave her a violent push.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Tremlett. I burst into tears.

But my mother, with matchless self-command, wound her arms round him, smiling, and drew him gently away, saying, "That's right; come away with me, Peter—come away from them all; we don't want them; come away!"

And, stumbling many times, he let her get him up-stairs. Then Mr. Tremlett, after one or two motions of his hands, raising them upward and letting them drop, took out his handkerchief and cried.

"You are a true friend," said I, drying my eyes. "I must go up to him now. But look in again soon."

"Oh, Miss Lyon, what a woman is your mother! Poor Lyon! quite gone! They've done for him!"

Turning back at the door, he said, "I'll go and represent to them the wreck he is, if I lose my own

situation for it. They ought to know, for it has been all in their own interest and that of their fathers before them.”

“Oh, thank you—thank you!”

“I’ll send in a doctor. He ought to be seen to. Perhaps he requires bleeding.” And tapping his head significantly, he said, “Pressure here.”

My father had a brain fever. The partners, who were youngish men, and inconsiderate rather than cruel, were concerned when they learnt how the case was ; but they said it was out of the question to let their accounts get inextricably confused for the sake of an old clerk. So he was dismissed free from blame—but still he was dismissed.

For a while it seemed so likely he would be taken from us very speedily that the mere question of life or death absorbed us. “Skin after skin, all that a man hath will he give for his life,” said the worst of created beings ; and we were ready to set every thing out of sight in comparison with that dear gift, if our loved one might but be spared, come what might hereafter to ourselves.

He *was* spared for a time, regained his sane mind, but in a lamentable state of weakness and depression, affectingly thankful for the most trivial offices of kindness, but quite spirit-broken.

Our kind doctor, who took much interest in him, did not rob us of hope.

“He may recover yet,” he said, “if he can have complete change of scene and entire rest and tranquillity.”

But where were the means? Who was to give him entire change of scene? Mr. Tremlett.

“I’ve taken a convenient little lodging for you down the river,” said he to him one day. “It is now out of season, and therefore dog cheap. You will be able to get down to it by steamer. There are two bed-rooms, and a little sitting-room with a bow-window. It is warm, snug, and cheerful, and the people of the house are civil and quiet. Not a word! If our cases were reversed you would do it unto me.”

How grateful we were to him! He accompanied us down, told us we were his guests, made an economical arrangement with the landlady for boarding us, and crowned his kindness by only looking in on us on Sundays. We were there a month. My father was greatly restored, and very placid. I stuck to my pencil, which was the only resource I could think of, and hoped it might contribute to the support of the family. It was the very worst season of the year; every thing out of

doors was dreary and desolate, but within we had many comforts that we had not at home. There was no help for it but frankly to accept the invaluable kindness of our old friend. He had occasionally spent a short summer holiday there, so he said it was next to entertaining us in a house of his own, and a good deal cheaper.

We returned home towards the end of February, when the weather was tolerably mild. Mr. Tremlett again tendered his good offices, managed to slip away from his desk, and got my father into the steamboat. When we reached the London stairs he again managed for us, saw all three into a cab, settled with the driver directly he had shut the door on us, and walked all the way himself. Passing through Covent Garden, he bought winter fruit and flowers, which he brought us in the evening. My father had gone to bed, and my mother was sitting with him.

After accepting the kind present, I said, "How can I repay you?"

He said, in a low voice, "By marrying me."

I said, "Oh, Mr. Tremlett, I cannot!"

"I am well aware," said he, "that at my time of life I am a most unsuitable match for a young lady of your youth and beauty, and—and—decorum,

and therefore should not have ventured to avow my profound regard but for the altered circumstances in which you find yourselves. Even now I will not press it if considered objectionable. I can only say that if you *will* take me for better for worse, I will strive to be better rather than worse, and the whole study of my life shall be to make you happy."

I said, "Oh, Mr. Tremlett, you are too good a great deal: I never can be sufficiently grateful; but do not press this, if my happiness is indeed a consideration to you."

"It is my first consideration," said he. "Well then"—after a pause—"I will not press it, since that is your wish. I don't want to make an Old Robin Grey affair of it. I would gladly have cast in my lot with yours, but since it is not to be, let us be friends as we were before, and as if I had never spoken. I was very near spoiling all—nay," with a wistful look, "perhaps I *have* spoilt all?"

"No, indeed you have not." I cordially gave him my hand.

"Thank you—then we quite understand one another."

CHAPTER XXII.

WAYS AND MEANS.

“But now the pleasant dream was gone,
No hope, no wish remain'd, not one !”

MY father was so much benefited by his holiday that we indulged hopes of comparative recovery. He himself was most anxious to be at work again, and constantly urged us and Mr. Tremlett to keep an eye on the advertisements and look out for something light for him to do. Mr. Tremlett put him off with temporizing answers ; but at length he came with a cheerful face to say he had heard of something that might suit him—a temporary clerkship in a house connected with that of Mr. Hartlepool, whose good word would doubtless secure it for him, “so, as you are an old friend of his, Lyon, you may very likely get it.”

My heart sank at the thought.

“You mistake, Tremlett,” said my father. “I never saw Mr. Hartlepool in my life, nor does he know any thing whatever of me. My wife knew

his wife, who, till lately, took very kind notice of my daughter.”

“Why, that will do as well,” said Mr. Tremlett. “A line from either of them to Mrs. Hartlepool will secure her interest ; and when there are many applicants, with perhaps hardly a pin to choose between them, interest carries the day.”

But I said, “Oh, no, Mr. Tremlett, we don’t correspond now, and I’m sure I should not secure her interest.”

He looked disappointed, and said, “Well, then, your father must take his chance with the rest, and very likely a more pushing man may carry it.”

“I’ve no push in me ; never had,” said my father, “but yet I should like to try for it. If Messrs. Maltby and Simmons would but give me their good word——”

“Surely they will, after so many years’ service !” said my mother.

Alas, the many years’ service was the very thing against him. I believe they wrote to Mr. Hartlepool that my father’s day was quite gone by—his head could no longer be depended on—for Mr. Hartlepool politely but decidedly declined to recommend him. This was a great blow to my

mother and me, as coming from his hand, and, as it were, widening the breach between us; while my father, who had buoyed himself up and put his best foot foremost for several days, slipped downwards again, and thenceforth gradually declined. It was but too evident he would have been unequal to the post had he obtained it; and this dejected him the more.

In the evening he was dull if Mr. Tremlett did not come and play cribbage. One evening Mr. Meggot dropped in and played with him, supped on bread and cheese and beer, and made himself so pleasant that we were glad to have him. My mother said, "How is Mrs. Meggot?"

After a little delay, he said, "The little woman is quite well, thank you."

"Does she like London?"

"No, she can't bear it."

He outstayed my father's usual hour of retiring. My mother at length said,—

"You'll excuse the freedom, I'm sure, Mr. Meggot. Mr. Lyon is but an invalid, and this is his bedtime."

"Oh, make no stranger of me," said he carelessly. "Good night, sir—I wish you quiet rest—accept my arm," and helped him to the stair-foot

very attentively, and then came back. I gave my mother a look.

“We *all* go early to bed,” said she quietly.

“I wish I could say the same,” rejoined Mr. Meggot, standing before the fire; “but where’s the good if one cannot sleep?”

‘Canst thou give medicine to a mind diseased?’

—Quoting Shakspeare puts me in mind of acting charades. Do you recollect the capital one we acted at Compton Friars, Miss Lyon? Ha, ha, ha! —Agamemnon!—ha, ha, ha! How that little Miss Rivers did lay herself out to please! Basil or your humble servant, it didn’t signify which to her. A born coquette. That boat adventure! don’t you remember? The cottage masquerade! and *what* flirting, coming home!”

“I think you had your full share of it,” said I, with a bitter-sweet enjoyment in recalling the past, even with him.

“Yes, yes, I took the encouragement given—any man would have done that. I rattled as she rattled. I knew I could do her no harm—she was born to the manner.”

“I think flirting always does harm,” said my mother.

“So it does, ma’am—tarnishes the youthful mind—rubs off the bloom. But Miss Rivers’ bloom was off already, so it could not hurt her. ‘The same woman still,’ as Electra said of Helen.”

“We need not speak ill of the absent.”

“Oh, no. By no manner of means—not even of uncle and aunt Hartlepool and their shabby way of throwing me off—I can’t think what possessed them—what visionary ideas they had in their heads. *I* suspected nothing, you know; always went when I was asked—liked being there, in fact. The girls always very pleasant, though Urith is *not* pretty——”

I did not like the turn his talk was taking, and began to hunt over the things in my work-box.

“You know how I used to go on there,” persisted he. “’Pon my life, I never meant any thing.”

I looked at him steadily and in displeasure, and said,—

“I never saw any goings on. And I am sure none of them ever suspected you of meaning any thing. How could they? Mr. and Mrs. Hartlepool were very kind to all the young persons that were fortunate enough to be in their house, and never expected they would misinterpret or abuse their kindness.”

“These candles will soon be out,” said my mother, after a pause.

“They will do for to-night,” I answered aside.

“Yes,—as far as I am concerned,” said Mr. Meggot, rousing from thought. “I’m keeping you up unconscionably. Good night, Mrs. Lyon. Thanks for my pleasant evening. Good night, Miss Lyon. I assure you *I* never misinterpret nor abuse kindness.”

Some days after this, when I returned from a walk, I found Mr. Meggot at cribbage with my father, with a tray, jug, and glasses on the table. I did not like the look of it, and my father appeared weary.

When Mr. Meggot was gone, he said,—

“My dear, I don’t wish to see that young man any more.”

It was Lent ; and the deep bell of an old city church near us duly called a handful of people together on prayer-days. One day, as I was returning from an errand for my mother, and musing on our prospects with a troubled mind, I saw my father tottering through the church-gate, and instantly hastened to him and slipped my hand within his arm. He looked round, smiled, pressed me affectionately to him, and we went in together

and seated ourselves in an old-fashioned pew. His face was full of pious reverence ; he stood up and sat down when it pleased him. I thought, " Can he follow the service ? At all events, he follows the Lamb whithersoever He goeth."

After this he went every prayer-day, my mother or I always accompanying him. How good and soothing it was to our souls ! I learnt to love the frequent bell. There was one hour that we could thus dedicate specially to the Lord who cared for us—who had laid down His life for us. Sometimes we sat a good while in the old pew before the service ; all the events of my humble, quiet life seemed then to pass in review before me. I thought, " He who spared not His beloved Son—how shall He not, with Him, freely give us all things ?"

By dint of careful management on my mother's part, my father always had a half-year's salary in hand—always had had since his first receiving it. He had saved no more, but he always had this to fall back upon. We had therefore no need to take disquieting thought for the literal morrow ; but we certainly did ask ourselves, " What shall we do at the end of the next six months ?" Ah, we need not have asked !

One day I called on Augusta, and found her, as

usual, full of her own affairs. She was engaged to be married to an ensign in a marching regiment ; but they had to wait.

“ I am without a housemaid,” she said presently, “ for Jane would not bear the least word, and is gone off in a huff. Would you mind going round to Mrs. Jeffrey for the address of that young woman she was speaking of ? I believe I must try her, after all.”

It was pleasant to me to call on Mrs. Jeffrey. Her little front parlour had just then the sun on it, streaming in on a cineraria in the window. She was writing, and looked very happy. Directly she learnt what my errand was, she promised to send to the young woman without delay ; “ and I think,” said she, “ Miss Burrows will like her, if she is not too exacting.”

“ You are not looking well, my dear,” she presently added. “ What ails you ? ”

So then I told her how we were circumstanced, saying, “ You must not think me complaining or faithless. When I came in just now I could hardly help envying you for looking so contented and peaceful.”

“ I was working to pay the piper,” said she ; “ and you may do so if you will.”

“Oh! please tell me how!”

She showed me the prospectus of a new magazine, the editor of which had invited her to contribute, and procure him a few good helps. He not only wanted papers by scientific men and scholars, but essays on popular subjects, healthy fictions, &c.

“Surely you may find something here to try your hand upon?” said she, showing me a list of subjects. “Your first efforts may not be successful, but at any rate they are worth making.”

I looked over it wistfully, and said, “I’ll try.”

I took down the names of a few subjects, which suggested others, after which I had a long, interesting, and profitable talk with Mrs. Jeffrey. That was the foundation of a literary career, humble as the little runnel of water that is not seen through the grass, but which has never since failed me. Its gains have been various, and generally small; it has been attended with continual suspenses, and not a few disappointments; but I have probably had as much unalloyed pleasure from literature as far better writers; for I love it for itself. Apart from rivalry, immoderate expectation of emolument and love of praise, its ways are ways of pleasantness, and its paths peace.

I went home cheerful and hopeful, and, shutting

myself in my room, knelt down and dedicated my pen to Him who could bless it if He would. Afterwards I told of the opening offered through Mrs. Jeffrey's kindness to my father and mother, who were as pleased as I was, and indeed too sanguine. Thus it put us all in good spirits.

In the evening there was a double knock at the door.

"That's Mr. Meggot," said my father, starting up in a flurry. "Send him away, my dear. Say I'm gone to lie down. Don't let the door be opened till I'm up-stairs."

This took him so long, even with his best speed, that I believe Mr. Meggot's patience was nearly exhausted. When Hannah answered the door, he said, "Oh! I was just going to knock again."

I put myself on the defensive when he entered, and received him standing. In answer to his inquiries, I said, "I am sorry to have to tell you that my father is not well enough to see you. He finds playing cribbage with you excites him too much, and that he must not do so any more. He is now gone to his room."

"Oh! poor Mr. Lyon!" he exclaimed, "poor old man! he's failing fast, Miss Lyon. My heart bleeds for him—for you—but most for myself. I've had

a loss——” and he buried his face in his handkerchief.

“Your wife?” said I, with an uncomfortable misgiving.

“No, my wife’s alive and likely to live. My poor dear mother!” And he cried afresh; there was no mistake in it.

“If any one could have set me straight,” he said, “she could.”

But then, she had not set him straight. I was concerned, and condoled with him as well as I could. He heard me very patiently, crying more than I ever saw a man cry; and I ventured to advise that he should make this bereavement a new starting-point towards a better and higher course. He laughed ruefully, and said,—

“Better and higher? Any course would be that, compared with what mine is now. I’m a lost Pleiad, that’s what I am. My pupils are gone, my mother is gone, and—well, I sha’n’t stand it much longer.” Adding, with sarcasm, “They won’t even have me at the funeral! I can soliloquize, though, with Hamlet, beside the grave.”

I said, “I think nothing would compose you more than some regular occupation, suited to the bent of your mind, which should take you out of yourself.”

“What is it to be, Miss Lyon?”

“Say—authorship.”

“I’ve haunted the trade from end to end, but they won’t have any thing to say to me. They say my handwriting is so villanous.”

“The first thing, then, should be to improve it.”

“What! go back to dame-school? to pothooks and hangers? ‘Delays are dangerous’? ‘Your time improve’? Come, I did not know I had fallen quite so low as that! Thank you, Miss Lyon.”

“Pray don’t take amiss what I said. It was only because the booksellers objected to your handwriting that it struck me you might obviate that objection with a little time and trouble.”

“Ah!”—with a deep sigh—“the spirit is not in me. The spirit is gone out of me; the good one, not the bad one.”

“He has only to be asked back again,” said I. “Oh! *do* ask! You will find it the secret of strength.”

“I dare say”—leaning dejectedly over the fire. He was so wasted that I pitied him from my heart and wondered if he were hungry, but I knew I could not invite him to eat.

“Well, I must go,” said he at length. “*Would* you be so good as to let me ring for a glass of beer?”

I said, "We have become water-drinkers."

"Oh, my goodness! Tea-totallers? ha, ha, ha!"

"Not exactly; but we really are out of beer. I wish I had any thing better to offer you than bread and butter; but—*will* you have some?"

"Many thanks, Miss Lyon; but, unfortunately, I'm a fellow who has fallen out with his bread and butter. Remember me most kindly to Mr. and Mrs. Lyon."

And, to my great relief, he went away.

"I'm glad he is gone," said my mother when I went up to her. "I thought he never would go, and was just coming down to tell him he must."

I was very glad she was spared such an office, and, after a little rumination, sat down to a quiet evening's authorship. My mother was pleased to see me at it.

Mrs. Jeffrey had said, "Whatever you have been, done, or suffered well, will henceforth turn to account; that is, if you have the making of a good author in you: but it is not every one that wishes to write who is made for a writer. Remember, too, what Sir Walter Scott said, that literature is a good stick, but a bad staff. You must not lean on it too heavily."

Those who are addicted to doing good find ways

and means for it, however limited their resources. Thus my mother was still always doing a kind turn to some one or other. One day a dirty, ill-written, ill-spelt note was left at the door by some party unknown, to this effect,—

“Mrs. Lyon is requested to look in at Number Fore, Twig Aley, seccund flore back, at fore oclock.”

“That poor Mrs. James has sunk one step lower, it seems,” said my mother. “She is one of those whom one may almost say one cannot help—at least, one can do no lasting good to, because she will not help herself. However, she must not starve, for all that. We have little enough for ourselves, but you shall just take her some tea and bread and butter for this one afternoon, and hear what she has to say.”

I went with the very small parcel, and in about half an hour reached Twig Alley, the abode of unthrift and squalor; the inhabitants of which one would have pitied more had they seemed to pity themselves. But as long as they had a morsel of food and unlimited gossip, they seemed to have all they wanted. Dirt was no drawback, cleanliness rather a nuisance—too smart for common use. A woman in the full tide of talk with a neighbour

was interrupted by a child plucking her dress and importuning her for food. She drew half a carrot from her pocket, bit a piece off, which she gave to the child, and replaced the remainder in her pocket.

I found No. 4 had an open stair common to all the inmates and their visitors. I went up two dirty flights, and, as I approached the second floor, was aware of an altercation going on in the back room. A woman was complaining and crying, interrupted at intervals by a loud "Hold your tongue!" in as aggravating a tone as I ever heard. Possibly what she was saying was aggravating too. At all events it was my office to interrupt it, which I did by tapping at the door and calling, "Mrs. James!"

No Mrs. James answered, though I repeated her name several times. At length there was a little cry of fright, fear, or pain; and, apprehending some overt offence inside, I opened the door.

A more untidy, comfortless room I never saw. Some washing hung on a line; other things were in process of ironing on a shabby table, which also bore the remains of food without any cloth, a bottle and glass, a pipe and tobacco-box. Balancing himself on a chair, with his face to the back and his back to the door, sat a man without his coat,

making as though he were aiming a book at the head of a slatternly young woman at her iron. Her angry blue eyes flashed, and her face reddened with passion, as she saw me in the doorway, and cried, in shrill accents,—

“Here’s Miss Lyon come to see you as you are!”

“Oh, Fanny!” I said.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CLOSING SCENES.

“ Unwept, unhonour'd, and unsung.”

SCOTT.

“ Not so comes darkness to the good man's breast.”

R. MONTGOMERY.

MR. MEGGOT looked round, stood up, and steadied himself with the chair, but seemed unable to get out a word. I was hastily retreating, when he said,—

“ No ; stay”—

And moved to the door, but then came back for his coat ; saying, as he went,—

“ You don't want my coat, ladies—my character I leave you ”

“ Because you can't help it, Meggot,” cried Fanny, in a loud, taunting voice. “ I'll show you up !”

“ Oh, Fanny !”

“ Why, I'm driven to it, Miss Lyon,” said she, bursting into tears. “ That heartless, unmanly fellow starves me, while he lives well himself,

smokes and drinks away all my hard earnings, does nothing from morning to night, and only comes home to taunt and scoff at me. He says I've spoilt his prospects! and hasn't he spoilt mine, after promising to make me a lady? If I *were* a lady, I should be no mate for him now, for he's no gentleman!"

"Mrs. Meggot, pray don't make things worse by complaining of him. I am very sorry indeed for you both—his prospects really *are* spoilt by his marriage, though it was his own doing."

"That indeed it was! I wish I'd never seen his face. I wish I'd been Mrs. Hartlepool's maid to this hour"—and she shed tears of passion and self-pity.

"Did you write to my mother?"

"Yes, I did, Miss Lyon, though I had no right to take such a liberty. Meggot was always twitting me with the way he was entertained at your house, and how you made much of him and never cared for me, and that he could not introduce me to any of his acquaintance, being no lady. That nettled me, so I determined to show him up, and wrote to your 'ma, thinking she would suppose me a poor person—which I am, sure enough—though he's made me a lady."

“My mother did suppose the letter was from a poor person,” said I, “and, though her own means are very limited, she sent you some tea and bread and butter and an egg.”

“Then I’m sure she’s kinder than I deserve,” said Fanny, again in tears. “The only act of kindness, if you’ll believe me, that I’ve received from any friend since I came to London. Oh, Miss Lyon! thank her for me, will you? and say I beg her pardon for writing.”

“I will; and now good-bye; but try to bear with your husband, and don’t speak to him or of him so unkindly. You fancy he feasts with his friends, but, indeed, I believe he is almost as hard-up as yourself, and he certainly seems to have tried to support himself by teaching. It is very difficult, sometimes, for men of education to find any thing whatever to do, especially when they are not on terms with their friends——”

“But *why* is he not on terms with them,” interrupted Fanny, “but for his drinking and smoking?”

“Chiefly for his imprudent marriage, I think; and you know it is imprudent for a man to marry when he cannot maintain a wife.”

“He don’t maintain *me*! For this long while he

has told me I must work or starve. He brings me home nothing."

"Perhaps because he has nothing to bring."

"Does he go the right way? If you'll believe me, Miss Lyon"—and then followed a string of troubles that I listened to most unwillingly; for I could see no prospect of setting either of them on a better track. Mr. Meggot's intemperate habits defeated every hope of his being reclaimed by any thing we could do; and his wife, freed from every restraint by a passionate sense of wrong, seemed an absolute shrew, who had married him for the selfish purpose of being raised to a position she was quite unfit to grace. She said, "He told me he should be forgiven before the year was out, and I should then visit his mother and Mrs. Hartlepool!"

A gentle tap at the door made Fanny suddenly lower her voice and compose her looks. A thoughtful-looking artisan opened the door without coming in, and said, "Good day, ma'am—is Mr. Meggot within?"

"No, Mr. Brown, I'm afraid he's at the Crown—he'll be in by and by."

"Here's his Ovid. Will you give him my respects, and say I'll come round to him this

evening, if convenient, unless he prefers meeting me at the Crown?"

"Oh, you'd better come here, Mr. Brown, than meet him at that nasty place"—adding, to me, as the man went away—"he's making that poor fellow as bad as himself—teaching him all his bad habits along with a little Latin."

How concerned my mother was when I told her the result of my visit!

"There can be no hope of him now," said she. "I hate the thought of him. He will be ashamed to show his face here again, that's one comfort."

And interceding for this man had lost me the Hartlepoons!

It seemed so strange to have my father always at home now! A great deal of his day was passed in sleep; when awake, he often seemed in a kind of mental torpor. He spoke little, but what he said was very gentle, very sweet. His patience was perfect; his memory much impaired, reminding me of some shattered, quaintly-painted old window, showing on its fragments here a cherub, there a cross.

Reading the Bible to him, which he never tired of, was as good for us as for him. How often, after a short absence, have I returned to find my

mother, with her hand locked in his, and the Bible on her knee, tranquilly reading to him!

One day, when thus employed, he quietly passed away! Surely there could not have been a more peaceful death! I had often tried to picture it to myself, but never dared to expect any thing as gentle as this. I had just come in, and cried, "Oh, mother!" She looked up in surprise, with her finger on the text she had just read, "And what I say unto you, I say unto all—Watch!"

Our tears of sorrow had no bitterness. How humble had been his trust in his Redeemer! How blameless and unselfish his life! It was a great mercy that he was removed so painlessly. "For so He giveth His beloved sleep." We were sure he was beloved—we were sure his faith was anchored on the Rock.

Mr. Tremlett was very useful to us at that time, and a great comfort; he managed every thing about the funeral, and attended it with us. Afterwards he sat some time, talking pensively and affectionately of his old friend; which was acceptable to my mother, though I was rather relieved when he rose to go.

My mother was then going to lie down, when a

dubious knock at the door made me exclaim, "Oh, wait till we know who it is. I sadly fear it is Mr. Meggot."

"Surely he would not intrude," said my mother; but he did intrude the next moment. She said repellingly,—

"Mr. Meggot, I am surprised;" but he interrupted her with,—

"Oh, how I deplore your loss! Poor Mr. Lyon! gone at last. Poor Mrs. Lyon! how will you survive him? What will you do?"

"These are questions for me, not for you, sir," she replied; "and I can't think why you come here any more. You never had any right to come at all; we were no friends of yours and did not invite you. My husband disapproved of your ways, Mr. Meggot; you were a gentleman in form, but you did not conduct yourself so. My opinion is, that if you don't break through your bad habits, you will sink into an early grave; and ask your own heart, sir, who will deplore you?"

He looked at her fixedly, as well he might; and when she ceased there was a moment's silence; and then he said very emphatically,—

"I shall never come here again"—and walked out of the house.

“And I’m sure I’m very glad of it,” said my mother. “What’s the use of looking so white, you foolish child? I told him the truth, and it will be all the better for him if he heeds it.”

He did not heed it, and in a few months he sank into an obscure, untimely grave. A devoted city missionary who attended him to the last came, at his desire, to tell my mother of his death and commend his widow to her kindness. With the missionary’s aid, she started her off to her grandfather in the country. We never heard of her afterwards.

We now reaped the benefit of my dear father’s self-denial and forethought, for he had insured his life for our benefit, and, though our income was materially lessened, we could manage to live on what the insurance secured. There was no reason why we should now live near the brewery, therefore we resolved to move into lodgings in some pleasant neighbourhood at the next quarter-day.

One morning I went to the Pantheon to look at the widows’ caps. I had gone to the upper floor, which was generally very quiet, and was looking down for a moment over the railing, on the parterre of gay counters like flower-beds below,

when some one suddenly accosted me. I turned round and saw Miss Poulter.

“Miss Lyon! I was sure it was you,” said she. “I saw you across from the opposite side and hurried round. I was so afraid I should miss you! Oh, Miss Lyon, what a shocking thing this is about the Hartlepoons!”

I gave a little cry, and said, “What is it? I have not heard.”

“Ruined, utterly ruined!” said Miss Poulter, drawing me to a seat. “Do sit down here awhile, the women are away at their dinners—oh, you never heard such a sad thing in your life. I could not have believed! Always thought so safe! But there was a rogue in the firm, and he made away with every thing, and then made away with himself, so there’s nobody to punish, you know. And at first nobody could account for it, and supposed it was hypochondria—but no such thing, it was *conscience!* because he knew it must be found out. And so, when it *was* found out, which was only yesterday, and actually before he was buried, it took poor Mr. Hartlepool so by surprise that he spun round like a top, in a vertigo, you know, and fell flat upon the floor. And they thought he was dead. But he came to after being bled, though some say that should not have

been done. And some one went down instantly to the family, and they all came up last night, Mrs. Hartlepool and all, and now you may conceive what a state they are all in."

I was crying bitterly, and said, "Have you seen them?"

"No, they see nobody. I called to inquire. *That* was my duty, you know, but I could not be surprised at not being admitted, for they don't see a soul, and Timothy looked as white as ashes. His eyes were quite red, and I believe he had been crying. It will be in the papers to-day, the inquest and every thing. Very likely it was in the evening papers last night. My nephew is junior clerk, so he knows every thing. He came in and told me di—There are the Claytons,"

Here Miss Poulter flew off to another acquaintance, scarcely allowing herself time to take leave of me. She seemed quite excited at having such news.

CHAPTER XXIV.

REVERSES.

“As various as the moon
Is man's estate below ;
To his bright day of gladness soon
Succeeds a night of woe.
The night of woe resigns
Its darkness and its grief——”

FULL of trouble I left the Pantheon, and walked rapidly towards Mr. Hartlepool's town-house. It had a disconsolate air, from having been long out of occupation—no flowers, no clean blinds or clean door-step. I was just inquiring, in great concern, “How is Mr. Hartlepool?” when Urith came hastily from the dining-room, saying,—

“Oh, Bessy! is that you? Oh, do come in! how long, how very long it is since we have seen you!” And then we both cried, and she drew me into the dining-room, and said,—

“What has kept you away all this time? Mamma was so surprised, and a little hurt too, for it seemed

as if you cared no longer for us, but yet I was sure that could not be, for I felt I knew you."

I could hardly speak at first. I said, "I thought Mrs. Hartlepool was angry with me."

"Angry with you? Oh, no! Why should she be? Even if there had been any thing to be angry about, it would have passed off long ago; but now we can only think of papa's critical state."

"How is he?"

"Very low indeed, but they say he will get over it, if he can keep his mind quiet. How is he to do that, Bessy? He is ruined! and will have to give up everything he has in the world, as a man of honour."

"Oh, what *will* you do?"

"Oh, we shall do something," said she, with the smile of hope and youth. "And now come up and see all the others."

What sweet kisses I received! What loving looks and words and caresses! It was hardly possible to be sorrowful under such circumstances—to realize the blow they had just sustained, and the changed prospects that lay before them. No explanations took place, none were felt wanting. Words of affectionate sympathy and pitying interest for my mother and me under our loss showed

that their hearts had room for others, even when their own future was so suddenly clouded.

I only saw Mrs. Hartlepool for a minute or two. Urith had gone to tell her I was in the house, and Marianne was sorrowfully telling me how her mother had at first been almost stunned by the news, but had rallied her powers to meet the emergency—when a cab rattled into the courtyard, some one sprang from it, ran into the house, up the stairs, and into the drawing-room.

“Marianne!”

“Oh, Tom!”

If ever there were a lovers' meeting, that was one. I don't think they had been acknowledged lovers before, even to one another or themselves. He had just landed, had gone straight to the counting-house, and heard of the catastrophe. Hence his rush into the house.

Urith came in at the same moment by a different door, and beckoned me out.

“Tom and Marianne don't look very unhappy,” said she, with a bright smile. “You see we have our little solaces, even at such a time as this.”

Mrs. Hartlepool received me at her bed-room door. “Just for a kiss, Bessy, and no more—all is going on well, but we are obliged to keep him

very quiet, and I cannot leave him. My kindest love to your mother. I was so sorry for her loss! I have never forgotten, my dear, what a comfort you were to us all. God is very good to us still. He will bring us safely through this trial."

She had known, then, of our loss ; then why did she not write ? there must have been some reason or feeling that Urith knew nothing of. Whether it were so or not, I never inquired. There are some things that are so much better left alone ; especially when they relate to misunderstandings between friends. What is the use of going all over them again, and reviving uncomfortable feelings ? As I went home, I thought I never felt how joy and sorrow may be bound up together, as I did then.

It was a great crisis, but they bravely passed through it. Every body said how honourably Mr. and Mrs. Hartlepool behaved. There was no "keeping back part of the price." I suppose when a man's credit is founded on unblemished character, he may always equitably raise money to meet an emergency. At any rate, after every thing had been given up, Mr. Hartlepool received such assistance from friends as enabled him to carry his family abroad, there to live frugally till

Basil and Mr. Brooke could communicate with him. A long time passed before they could effectually aid him ; meanwhile, his spirit was subdued to what it worked in ; and his desires moderated when he found how perfectly happy he and his family could be, living in the simplest manner imaginable. The old chain was broken and never renewed.

Basil, however, returned from India to take up what was left of the business, and found excellent support from his father's old connexions. In course of time he married Miss Anne Keith, who was said by the family to be every way worthy of him.

Meanwhile the Hartlepoons remained in a quaint old French provincial town, with most beautiful environs, where living was cheap, and there was a little knot of English to afford pleasant society. And here they remained many years, till the death of dear Mrs. Hartlepool, and afterwards of her husband.

CHAPTER XXV.

PARADISE LOST.

“What sorrows gloom’d upon that parting day
That call’d them from their native walks away !”

Deserted Village.

BUT long before that, Captain Hartlepool was made post, and married Marianne. It was a very pretty wedding, I was told, and Urith wrote me a charming account of it; but I could never believe that, in a foreign land, with foreign ways and foreign people, it could have borne comparison with Helen’s wedding at Compton Friars.

That dear wedding! the only one I ever assisted at! Its flowers have perished; its favours been consigned to the fire; its merry peal has died away; nay, many of the guests are dead, and the rest have grown, or are growing old. The bridal pair that took each other that day for better for worse have been since tested many times in the fire, and not found base metal. They have blooming young

people springing up around them, as hopeful and engaging as they themselves once were, to whom Compton Friars is but a tradition.

Where are Eva and Blanche?—Dead! Where are Mr. and Mrs. Hartlepool?—Dead! Where is Urith?—Urith still lives, but beyond my reach. When the family went abroad, to live as cheaply as possible, she threw herself into authorship, and this time with success. Thenceforth it became her passion—her vocation. She did not maintain her family, but she contributed to many of its comforts; and she had a constant source of pleasurable and profitable occupation.

We were indebted to Mr. Tremlett for finding us our pretty lodgings, which at first we only thought of for a few weeks, but ended by making our permanent home. It seemed a providential arrangement that suited our health, tastes, and finances. My mother, relieved of the anxieties of housekeeping, took, as it were, a new lease of life. Our bed-room looked into a pretty garden, gay with old-fashioned flowers—made the playground, at certain hours, of six nice little boys who were Mrs. Harper's day-scholars. These children, far from being a nuisance, were my mother's delight. They were exceedingly well managed, and very

fond of the cheerful, good-tempered little widow who had charge of them. By degrees she and my mother became good friends; she made friends of the little fellows too, and was famous for coddling and petting, and tying up cut fingers. My talents, too, came occasionally into play in the way of hemming sails for little boats, sewing miniature union-jacks, painting pictures, and telling stories. Our bow-windowed sitting-room faced a lively little mall, with tall trees and gleams of the Thames, with something always passing. My mother never wearied of the look-out; it was a constant amusement to her; and to Mr. Tremlett, too, on Saturdays and Sundays.

Meantime my correspondence with Urith languished. This was not my fault, for I never left a letter of hers unanswered. But I did not want to intrude on her leisure; and when her letters became so infrequent I felt as if it *would* be intrusion to write to her. She was forming new friendships with people well worth knowing, and how could I expect to preserve a place among them? I have since thought there may be as much self-consciousness in being too diffident as too forward; but the old constraint remains. I don't think I could write to Urith now; unless, indeed, she were

to write first to me. Then she would pitch the key — lead the subject. I should write fast enough!

Well, let her remain a memory that it is a pen-
sive luxury to dwell on. In this still, solitary hour,
with the rain beating against the window-panes
and now and then finding its way down the
chimney and hissing in the fire, it *is* a luxury to
muse on the past, and picture Compton Friars in
the embers.

Years after the Hartlepoons had left it I took it
into my head to make a pilgrimage thither. It
was after the tranquil death of my beloved mother,
when I felt very sad and in want of some pleasant
interest. I had visited her grave—she was not
there; I went to my father's grave—he was not
there; their ashes lay apart, but their spirits were
with those of the just made perfect. I felt utterly
lonely without them. I thought I would go down
to Compton Friars.

Spring was rejuvenizing the copses, the hedges,
the meadows; violets and primroses were blooming
under old trees, and little children were gathering
them; yellow butterflies and also little blue ones
were on the wing—blue butterflies such as I never
saw but at Compton Friars; cows perfumed the

air with their fragrant breath ; a little heifer playfully butted me into a dry ditch, refusing to be frightened at my parasol ; the lime-walk, down which Mr. and Mrs. Brooke had strayed as lovers, was in leaf, and thousands of bees were inquiring after the blossoms.

Then I went and stood at the gate of Compton Friars, and looked wistfully at the house.

It was the dear old place still. There was something about it that could not be altogether defaced ; but much of the rust had been scoured off the old medal. Snapdragon and stonecrop had been torn from the old grey walls, which were newly painted ; the evergreen sentinels had been grubbed up, and smart new stone urns on pedestals supplied their place. I beheld a verandah shining with bright green paint, and a blue, red, and yellow macaw on a stand set on the lawn.

Ah ! to me the old place was spoilt ; I did not care to look at it long ; and I was quickened in my retreat by a carriage issuing from some new stables. I took a pensive ramble through the woodlands, strayed down to the church, and went into the village shop, where Mrs. Smith recollected me. She said,—

“ You used to visit Mrs. Hartlepool, I think,

ma'am ; you were down here with Miss Urith and Master Edwy ?”

So then we had a good talk. She told me some things I did not know, and I told her some things she did not know, that interested us both. She spoke with much affection of the Hartlepoons. In her parlour hung a little sketch of the church, given her by Helen. On the chimney-piece was a little ornament in straw-work made by Eva. When I observed how many of them were dead, she said,—

“To me it is as if they all were dead. I suppose I shall never see any of them again.”

It seemed a natural thing to suppose. She lamented their going abroad, and wondered how they could have reconciled themselves to the uncomfortable foreign ways. She wanted to know what had become of little Master Edwy.

I told her he had grown, I was told, into a fine young man—good, spirited, and brave. He had gone to sea with Captain Hartlepool and seen a great deal of the world.

Ah! she was always sure he would be a credit to the family.

Altogether, this talk with Mrs. Smith did me good. I returned to my riverside lodgings softened

and solaced ; but I did not want to revisit Compton Friars. To me it had once been a paradise ; now it was a Paradise Lost.

I still stay on here, for it suits me as well as any where else ; and the place is associated with my dear, dear mother. I like the river ; I like the little mall ; I like Hampton Court and Bushy Park, especially when the horse-chestnuts are in bloom. I am on friendly terms with a little handful of acquaintance. I draw, and read, and write, as it pleases me ; and I muse rather too much, and am perhaps habitually too silent. But when I feel I want rousing, I go to Mrs. Jeffrey, now very old, who regards me as still rather young, and sometimes I stay with her several days.

We read of an old monk whose office it was to exhibit to strangers a picture of the Last Supper, in the refectory. Alluding to the painted figures remaining where they were, while so many who had looked at them were gone, he said, feelingly, "Sometimes it seems to me that these are the substances and we the shadows."

I have something of the same feeling when I dwell on the past. The pleasures of memory, however, must not be morbidly indulged. We

should rather press onward to the things that
are before.

“ Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,
Is our destined end and way ;
But to act, that each to-morrow
Find us farther than to-day.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

PARADISE REGAINED.

“Where'er I roam, whatever realms I see,
My heart, untravell'd, fondly turns to thee.”

URITH has written!—why did I ever distrust her? What a completely different hue she has thrown over everything! She says,—

“Where are you, dear Bessy? I want you of all persons in the world, and I am not sure that your old address will find you. I only arrived in London yesterday, and have a thousand things to arrange, but, first of all, I must scold you for your old trick of hiding out of sight and keeping me in ignorance of your whereabouts. I know you are just the same as ever, dear Bessy! and will not chide you even in sport. No, I am too happy just now for chiding, and must make you partaker of my happiness; but, first of all (not the *first* first, though), let me tell you of my immense surprise and delight when I found that those

sweet little stories by 'Melissa,' in the *Omnium Gatherum*, were by you! Why, I have delighted in them all along! I have sent them out to Helen and Marianne; and Anne takes in the *Omnium* for no other reason than that Melissa's stories are in it, and even Basil likes them. And why Melissa, I pray you? Oh, I see: B. stands for Bessy, and Melissa is a bee, and so Melissa stands for Bessy. Is that it?

"My dear Bessy, we will talk over all our grand authorship concerns the first time we have leisure,—but I can't tell when that will be; for now comes the news. John Brooke has realized enough to retire upon, though not as a millionaire, and he is coming home with dear Helen and the children. He has written to tell Basil that he desires, of all things, to get possession of Compton Friars, and wants to know if he has a chance. Now, it most fortunately happens that Mr. Hopkins has just fixed his mind on a much larger place, and is willing to part with Compton Friars for what he gave for it. The transfer is therefore going to take place immediately, and directly they go out, we go in; which is to say, you and I go in, Bessy, if you have no objection, for so Helen wills. She says we know exactly how to make the house like

what it was formerly ; she cannot trust to Basil's memory, even supposing him willing and able to take the trouble. So you and I are to go and make ready for them (they come in the next ship), and Basil will be at our charges.

“ I say *our*, because I make sure you will like to go down there with me”

Like it? to be sure I shall! Who would ever have thought of such delight being in store? What becomes now of my never wishing to see the old place again?

I lost no time in going to Urith, and, after the first look and kiss, we could not help laughing at Time's changes! But we *could* laugh, that was one good thing, to see that we were at first sight hardly recognized by each other ; and in a few minutes we traced the old looks, tones, and ways, and were on the same footing as ever.

We went down together to the dear old house. The carpets had been taken at a valuation, so the rooms did not look altogether unfurnished. Urith had been afraid of finding the colours and patterns unsuitable, but they were not so, and such handsome carpeting had never been seen on the floors in the olden time.

Sundry heavy pieces of furniture were brought

back again, and I was able to supply a pattern of the old chintz which had been given me for patch-work. I spared no pains till some old pieces were rummaged out of a warehouse, though the blocks had long been destroyed.

The clock on the stairs!—that, too, was reclaimed from the cottage of a poor man, who was glad to part with it for a consideration. The book-shelves! I could recollect every book that used to be on them, and we replaced every one, though not the same copies. The general effect was wonderfully like, and gave us infinite pleasure to produce.

“But how much better the new window-sashes fit!” said Urith; “and what has become of the rats? The water does not come through the roof any where now; and some of the old floors have been relaid.”

“We never found any thing amiss in the house as it stood,” said I stoutly.

“No; only I remember the rain dropping through the ceiling on my face one night.”

We had delightful talks at dusk, when the day’s work was done, and did not care to ring for lights much before supper. We had pleasant afternoon walks, too, often lasting till sunset. One evening Urith paused before the old carved gate of a very

little, quaint red-brick house, called the Hermitage. It was smothered in bright-hued flowers, with an infinity of little flower-pots at the door-way and under the window. The tiny garden, on undulating ground, was in the highest order, with rustic steps cut here and there ; I noted bee-hives and a sun-dial.

“I have often persuaded myself,” said Urith, “that this must have belonged to the Prior’s reeve, though of course it is not ancient enough for that. What is the date built into the wall ? 1642—long after the destruction of monasteries. It would be just the place for me, if Mrs. Gretton would be so obliging as to turn out.”

“Don’t you mean to live with Helen ?”

“I hope to stay with her often, but not to live with her. On many accounts, it may be best for me to have a little home of my own. I require a good deal of quiet, now that I am an old lady.”

“You old, Urith ? It sounds droll to hear you say so !”

“It is droll, sometimes, to feel so ; but it is fact nevertheless.”

Another time we talked over my first visit to Compton Friars, and the old, quite ancient joke of “the deed without a name.” “Those boys !”

“And how shocking poor Mr. Liddell’s end was, after all!” said I more seriously.

“His end? What do you mean?” said Urith.
“You mystify me. His end has not come yet.”

I was astonished, and said, “Surely his ship was lost?”

“Oh, no, only driven out of its course and disabled somehow. It happened so long ago that I have forgotten nearly all about it. We *were* a long time without letters, certainly; but then we did not expect any, for papa and Mr. Liddell were not exactly correspondents—never wrote unless they had something to say.”

“You amaze me!” said I: Urith smiled at the equivoque. “Not at their never writing unless they had something to say,” I added, laughing, “but at Mr. Liddell’s not thinking it worth while to send home word that he was alive, and more especially at his *being* alive after all.”

“Oh, he sent home word to his sister, no doubt—the only living person who was nearly connected with him,” said Urith, “but we were not intimate with her. After a time, as she was not very well off, he sent for her to live with him. And they have gone on together very comfortably till quite lately, when, having a moderate competence, they have returned to England.”

“Dear me, and so he is really alive!” said I wonderingly.

“He was so up to last Wednesday,” said Urith, laughing, “for he and his sister dined with Basil. They are quite elderly people, now ; old, I might say, but very cheery. And they have a niece,—no, an adopted daughter, an orphan, called Lucy Palmer, who lives with them and gives a whiff of youthfulness to the little establishment. Miss Liddell says they are as happy as the day is long.”

I stayed with Urith till the Brookes arrived, and then, after a day or two more, I came home. I don't think it possible for a woman, at my time of life, to be happier than I am. Helen and Marianne would, of course, laugh at the idea ; but it is true for all that!

THE END.

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